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HOLLYWOOD BABYLON

KENNETH ANGER

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by KENNETH ANGER

HOLLYWOOD (hol'i•wood'), n. **a** A suburb of Los Angeles, Calif. famous for the motion-picture industry established there. **b** Hence, the American motion-picture industry. — **Adj.** Of, pert. to, or characteristic of Hollywood.

BABYLON (bab'i•lon), n. [L., fr. Gr. **Babylon,** fr. Heb. **Babel.** See BABEL.] **1.** An ancient Semitic city in the Euphrates Valley, which about 2225 B.C. was the richest and most magnificent of cities. **2.** Any center of luxury and wickedness. **3.** A place of captivity or exile; — in allusion to the fifty-year captivity of the Jews from 597 B.C. by Nebuchadnezzar.

BABEL (ba'bel), n. [Heb. **Babel,** fr. Assyr.-Bab.] **1.** A city and tower in the land of Shinar, the scene of the confusion of languages **(Gen. xi.9). 2.** A structure impossibly lofty; a visionary scheme. **3.** A place or scene of noise or confusion; also, a confusion of cries, voices, or languages.

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HOLLYWOOD was not yet a dirty word in 1916. It was just a junction of dirt roads, a solitary "Mission-style" hotel, some claptrap bungalows scattered in the orange groves, and the startling apparition of a Babylon orgy in full swing in the sunshine, smack on Sunset Boulevard.

Fat phallic columns topped with pat-a-cake plaster elephants dwarfed thousands of costumed extras drained from greater Los Angeles: improbable priests adoring Ishtar, tootling trumpeters, slaves waving feather fans, warriors and wantons, noblemen carousing with courtesans, legions of lascivious dancing girls.

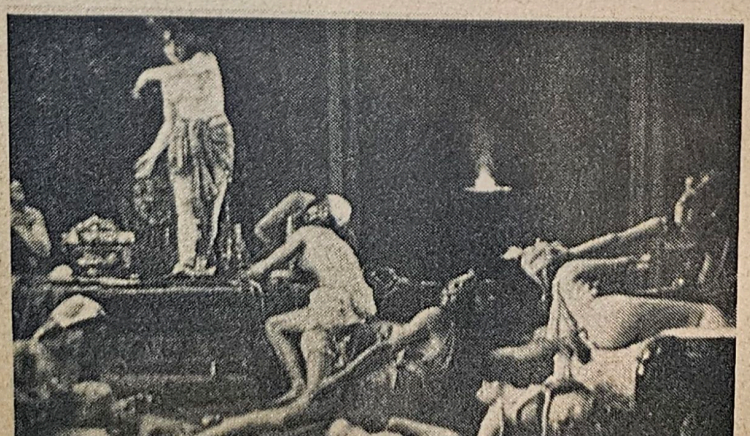
That orgy — Belshazzar's last blowout — lovingly staged by D. W. Griffith for his calamitous epic, *Intolerance*, set the tone for the burgeoning movie town: something to live up to, something to live down.

King Belshazzar of Babylon an orgy did decree, in Griffith's INTOLERANCE (1916).

The shadow of Babylon had fallen over Hollywood. Scandal was waiting, just out of camera range.

Hollywood had been midwived into existence by sharp carny-turned-nickelodeon operators, enterprising junk dealers and glib glove salesmen lured

Bare beauties revel in a Hollywood Babylon—("Temple of Love" in INTOLERANCE).



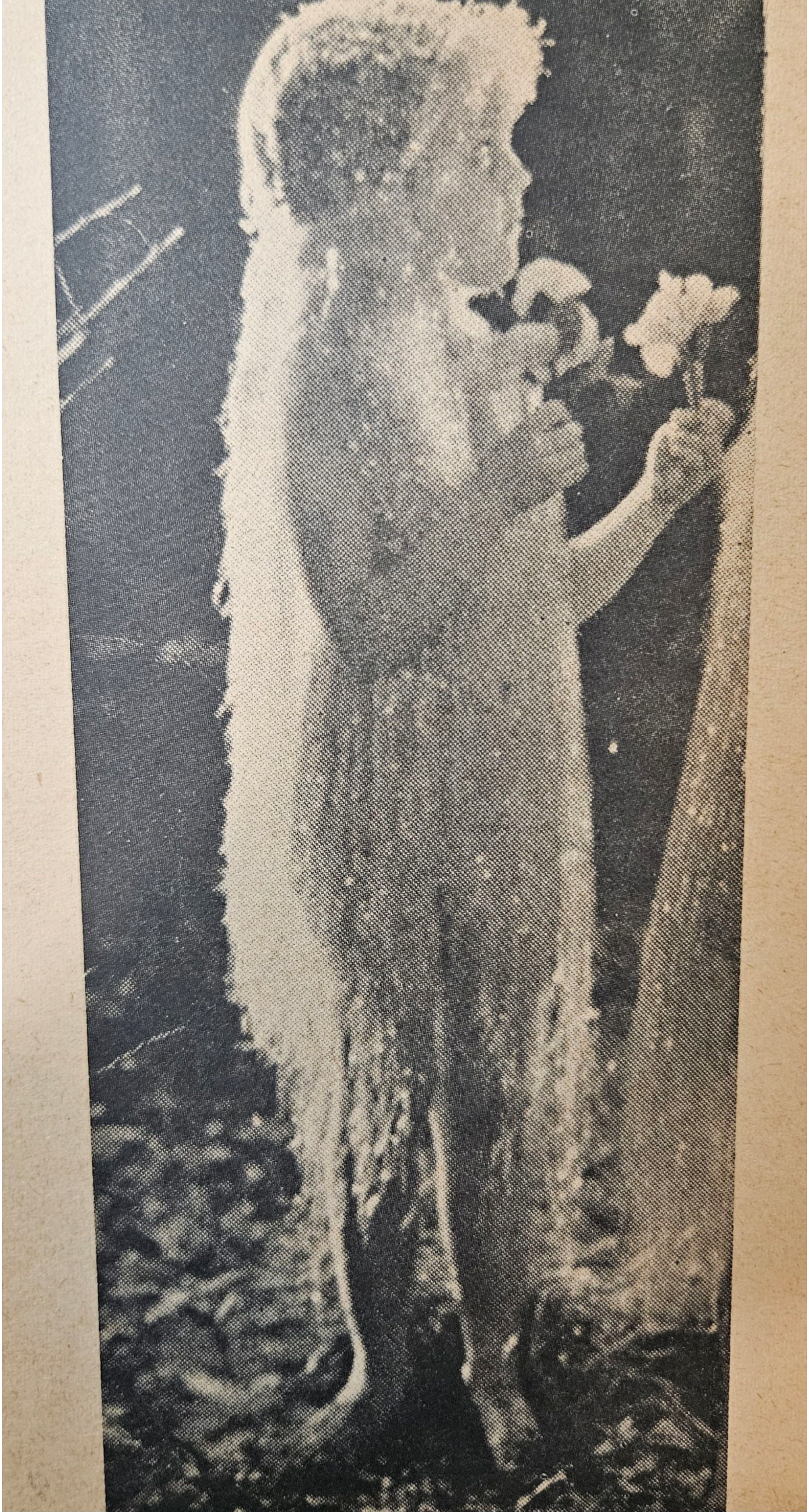
West by the promise of low-priced land and lots of free sunlight. The lonely Los Angeles suburb they settled on had neither holly nor wood — just acres of barley fields which soon sprouted ramshackle open-air stages. In a few years of churning out primitive and profitable two-reelers, the con-men from Back East juggled an iffy operation into a celluloid goldmine. When word reached them that crowds all over the country flocked to see a favored performer — known only as "Big Bill" "Little Mary" or "The Biograph Boy" — the "hired help" suddenly became sought-after, valuable property; the ticket-selling faces took on names and the "star-system" was born. Cinemaland was cursed in its cradle by that fatal chimera, the "Star."

Overnight obscure vaudeville comics became overpaid, lordly celebrities; agile ranch-hands, good-looking garage mechanics, plump plumbers' helpers, winsome waitresses and sexy shopgirls found themselves propelled on the giddy trembling tightwire to adulation, fame and fortune. If they made it across the abyss, they were members of that charmed circle, the Golden People. Some took it in their stride — some did not.

Even Leo was placid in the Tranquil Teens.

During the halcyon days of Hollywood's first decade, the Tranquil Teens, there were no scandals to titilate the prurience or trigger the temper of the public. Such "scandals" as there were took the form of backstage backbiting, a vice as old as show-business. The pioneer film colony could settle back in its canvas camp-chairs in the brief intervals between takes and consume in private its *own* juicy stories: whoppers or sly observations, as the case may have been. They supped on salacious suppositions of the private vamping and boudoir antics of Theda Bara and her chief rival in lethal seduction, Louise Glaum. Everybody knew that Theda, ballyhooed as hailing from a pasha's harem and as Sin Incarnate, really hailed from Cincinnati, where she was just meek little Theodosia Goodman, a seamstress in her daddy's tailor shop. "Putting her over" as a demon of depravity really cracked them up, but they didn't dream of letting the public at large in on the joke. The Barnum background of the carny boys bore its first fruit in fobbing off a "dodo" as deadly Theda, loathed by women, lusted after by men. A tower of lies brought lines to the box office, proof that Barnum's sucker-theory held true for the flickers.

Theda Bara in SIN: Soon Synonymous with Hollywood!



Dick Barthelmess: Salty quips about his past.

Other tidbits savored by the film-folk were candied calumnies concerning leading director D. W. Griffith's irrepressible reputation as a "chickenhawk" — his off-screen as well as on-screen preference for pretty, innocent Lolitas. It was recalled that Griffith and his cameraman, "Billy" Bitzer, had insisted on a closed stage when they had bared teenage girls and filmed them nude, unchaperoned, as "Guardians of the Flame" in the Babylonian "Temple of Love" scenes in *Intolerance*. Two of D. W.'s "discoveries" came in for their share of knocks: endless conjectures about Lillian Gish's legendary cherry; salty quips about how Dick Barthelmess once posed for a sizzling series of "French postcards" when he was young, broke and hungry. (The legend of What a Star Did Once When He/She Needed the Money will die a hard death in Hollywood.)

Some film-folk had a preference for pretty, innocent Lolitas (opposite page).

There was also tattle about Mack Sennett's "horizontal selection method" in his Keystone Studio office for those bathing beauties, young Gloria Swanson and Carole Lombard among them, who composed his hand-picked harem of Sunshine Girls — Hollywood's first, historical *"casting couch"* — an overstuffed Victorian item in tufted green leather.

Gloria Swanson: Backstage tattle.

Hollywood was soon branded a new Babylon.

Yet Hollywood could babble on, secure in the knowledge that the malicious gossip would remain behind the scenes: Lollipop the Scandalmonger had yet to set up shop.

In a few more years hellfire preachers would be maligning the movie-makers and all their works. Sin and cinema would become synonymous. Priests would brand Hollywood a "New Babylon" whose wickedness rivaled the legendary lewdness of the old. Banner headlines and tsk-tsking editorials would equate Sex, Dope, and Stars. The country's organized cranks — women's clubs of shrill, "revolutionary" spinsters, pressure groups of embittered blue-noses and professional prudes — screamed for blood and boycott, while the public, bless 'em, unfazed, flocked in ever-increasing multitudes to the movies, their favorite entertainment.

Satin and Lace: Symbols of the decade.

Hot on the heels of the film colony's Tranquil Teens, there followed that "fabulous" decade sometimes referred to rather lightly as "Hollywood's Golden Age." A cocktail of nonstop capers by the film-folk who were by now world-famous, worshipped, worldly and wealthy, if not wise. The legend overlooks one small fact.

During most of the Twenties, Hollywood was scared shitless. And witless.

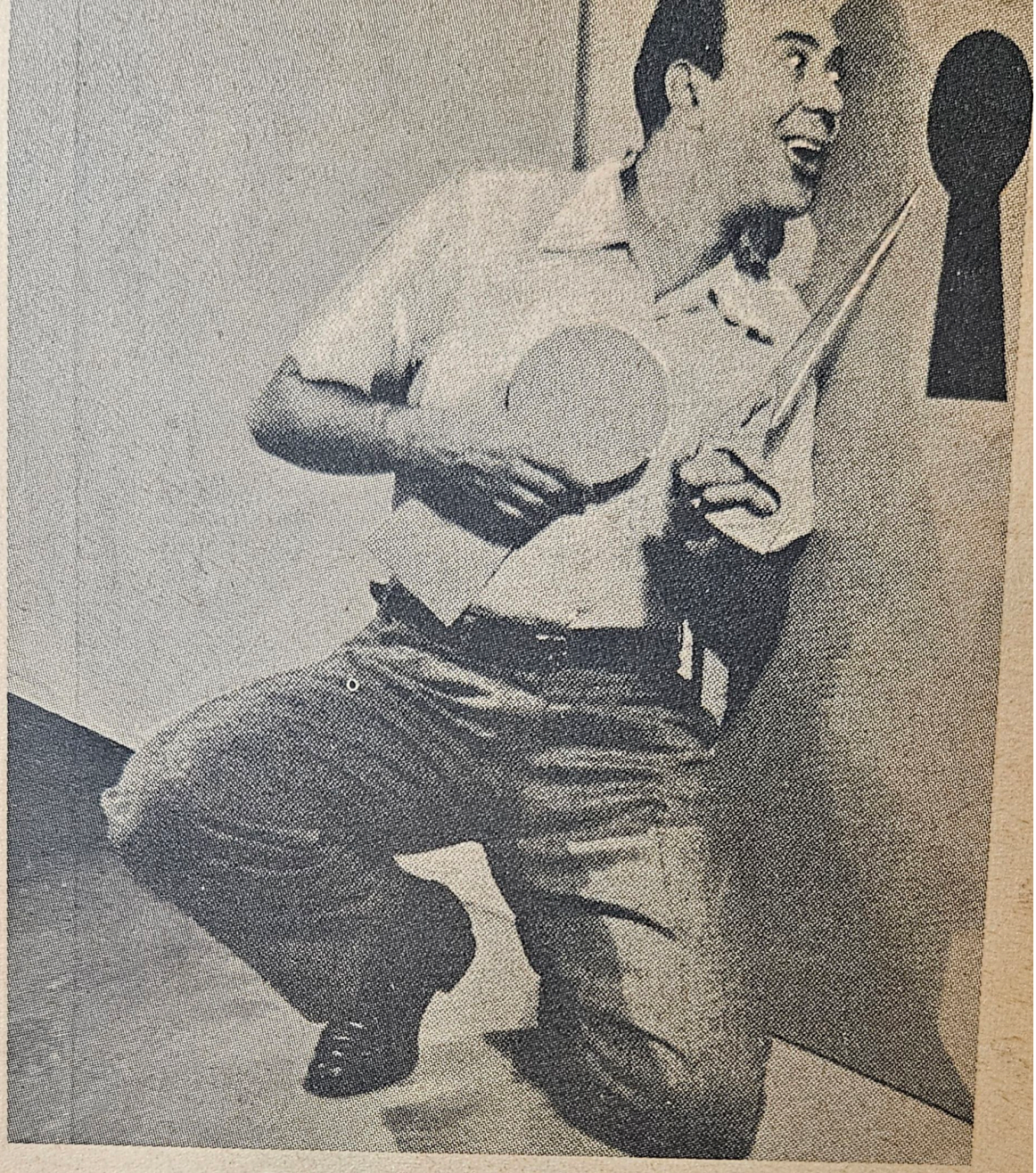
During the Teens, Hollywood could even muster a certain secret pride in some of the shenanigans — sexual or just plain silly — of their wilder denizens. After all, they were Show-Folk. Sophisticated. Their pleasure dome on the Pacific was a swinging oasis in a desert of squares, who, moreover, supported them by buying tickets to the picture shows at least once a week. A good joke. Besides, all self-respecting people *knew* all actresses were whores; what was "true" for the stage was doubly certain for the tacky pictures. So why not swing along with the legend?

Cecil "Baldy" DeMille with hair.

Cecil "Baldy" De Mille was even called a sanctimonious stick-in-the-mud for turning down invitations to go partying. When one party almost got out of hand — it was a blast thrown by Fatty Arbuckle at a roadhouse in 1917, involving starlets and a striptease by the host, and a nosy neighbor who looked in at just the wrong time — the film colony took the hushed-up news good-naturedly as just another exploit by their "wild man;" they were reassured that silence could be golden, even if the roly-poly movie nabob had to fork over huge sums to the police and even to the governor to buy it.

Virginia Rappe, rape victim, "bottled" by the tabloids in 1921.

—Fatty the Clown.



Peeping Toms and Stellar Fans—

Coming events cast their shadows before them — the handwriting was on the wall, but Hollywood couldn't be bothered to read it.

Just a few years more and Hollywood would be quaking at the very mention of those two little words, *"Fatty,"* and *"Party"* — the film-folk would have cold chills right down to their smart spats and chic brocaded slippers. The Twenties proved that scandal could be deadly as well as diverting.

Scandals exploded like time-bombs all during the decade. Stars took on the airs of scapegoats as career after career was destroyed. For Hollywood it was more the Terrible Twenties, more like a picnic on a volcano you pretended wasn't there, than the

fabled care-free "Golden Age." More than once during the decade the studio heads sweated it out, fervently wishing that certain activities of their stellar contractees were not the object of such obsessive, continuous public scrutiny. They were getting gimlet-eyed attention and headlines they hadn't bargained for. The glory-road of the "Hollywood Golden Age" was beset with booby-traps. Firebombs like the Arbuckle Scandal and others of its magnitude were blistering the gilt off the backsides of the Golden People, even if they were too game or too "grimly gay" to admit it . . .

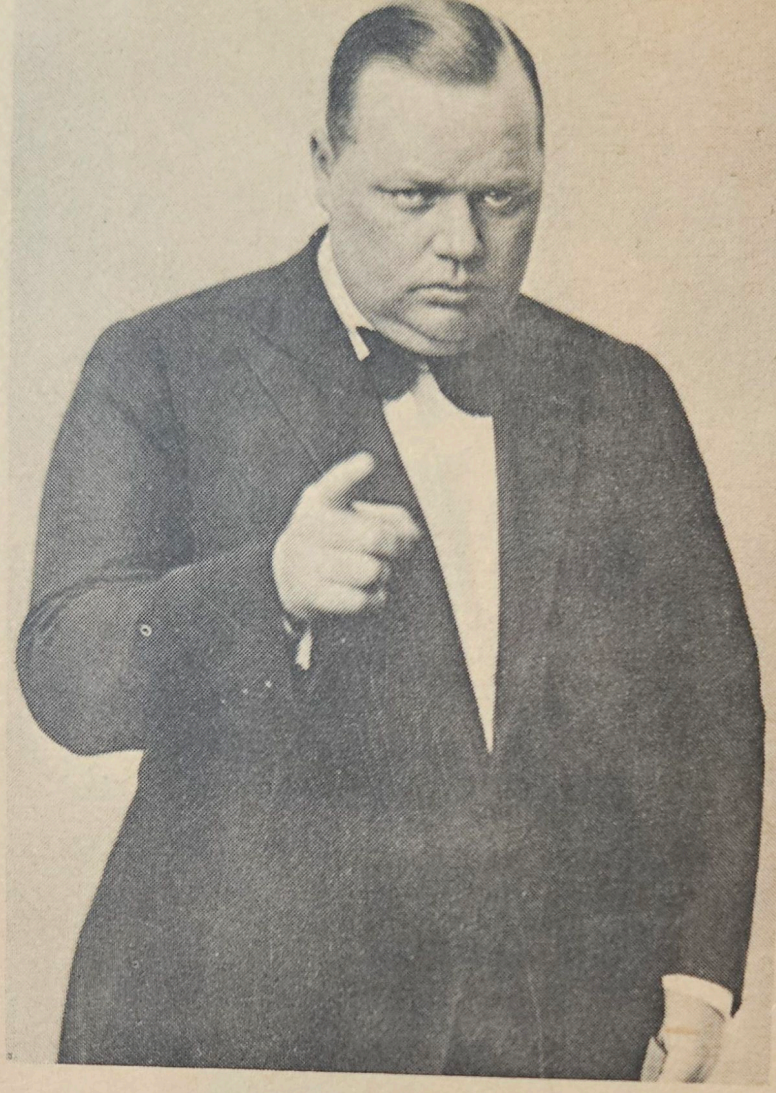
"PRIVATE LIFE" of a Star (Carole Lombard, 1927).

Though the Twenties was often a waking nightmare for those *within* the film-industry, it was genuinely "golden" at least in respect to the cascade at the box office. Everybody and his baby brother and kid sister wanted to go out to the pictures, at least once a week, often more, and everybody could somehow manage to find the coin to pay. And pay *lots more,* as plush gimcrack Balaban & Katz Cinema Cathedrals, one more stupefying than the next, sprung up in cities across the land to accommodate the well-heeled Faithful. The multitudes flocked to the darkened temples where the flickering shadows danced — fleeting visions of erotic and exciting dieties, borne through the somehow wicked and wonderful darkness on the lush groundswell from a symphony orchestra. They were Wonder Sanctuaries where millions worshipped, from the depths of loges, their Idols on the argentine altar on high — where huge, disembodied countenances of awesome gods and adorable goddesses matched their marcelled, pastel profiles, while mouthing mute, blessedly inaudible nothings.

All over the world this novel and pagan religion flowered — and left its offerings *before* crossing the sacred precinct. This religion, enormously lucrative for its perpetrators, as cynical as they were shame-

Fleeting visions of erotic and exciting dieties.

Mabel Normand was worshipped by the faithful.



A Bacchus named Fatty.

A Clara called Venus.

And a Charlie known as Pan.

less, was just old heathen hedonistic Body Worship dolled-up in a new disguise — the adoration of the Stars of Hollywood, U.S.A.

There was Venus and Adonis only called Clara and Rudy; there was Pan called Charlie; there was even old Bacchus named Fatty and maimed Vulcan named Lon. It was an illusion, a tease, a fraud; it was almost as much fun as the "old-time religion" — without blood on the altars. But the blood would come.

The Hollywood Religion — "Star Worship" — of the Heavenly Bodies began when the flicker-figures doffed their anonymity, taking each a made-up name (obligatorily euphonious — Bunny, Dove, Pretty, Sweet), matched with a made-up personality, and a colorful, spicy "private life;" — necessarily an enormous snow job — the whole teetering structure sup-

Mary Miles Minter, member of the select few.

Mabel Normand: Another star of the First Magnitude.

ported by press-agents' handouts, planted news items, slush-and-gush fan-magazines, and studio-inspired fan-clubs. The desires and frustrated appetites of the fans were focused into an awesome kind of bug-eyed, Beatlesque, frenzied worship; ready to erupt at any public glimpse of the idol in the flesh, and, more pertinent, conditioned to *pay* and *pay* and *pay* for his shadow at the box office. Never have so few — for the Hollywood Stars of the First Magnitude were never more than a select few, a charmed circle—furnished masturbation-fodder for so many. No other Religion can make that statement.

Frenzied worship was Rudolph Valentino's due.

For the fanatic adepts of this new cult, and they were legion — mostly female, teenage, or female and teenage-minded — H-O-L-L-Y-W-O-O-D was a wonder-word, a thrice-struck tuningfork invoking the Fabulous World of Make-Believe. The girders of the soul shuddered at the sound. It was *more* than a dream-factory with forbidding walls where one young hopeful in a million got a break. It was more than just a sexy Oz. It was *somewhere else*.

For the adepts, *Hollywood* was just about as "far-out" as you could get. Beyond our home galaxy; an Id-dependent universe following its own course, composed of Ego-Stars — sex-shining, eternal, dermal lust. But also there were drifting, lightless asteroids, shattered souvenirs of exploded, extinguished Stars, which — though they shone no more — retained an indistinct magnetic power. In this galaxy was also encountered the phenomenon of Starlets — erratic, erotic comets which sometimes, *rarely*, flamed into Stars of the First Magnitude following a collision with a Freefloating Casting Couch. Also to be seen were Shooting-Stars — bright one-night wonders, flammable tinsel meteorites, swiftly blazing into nothing and plummeting to oblivion.

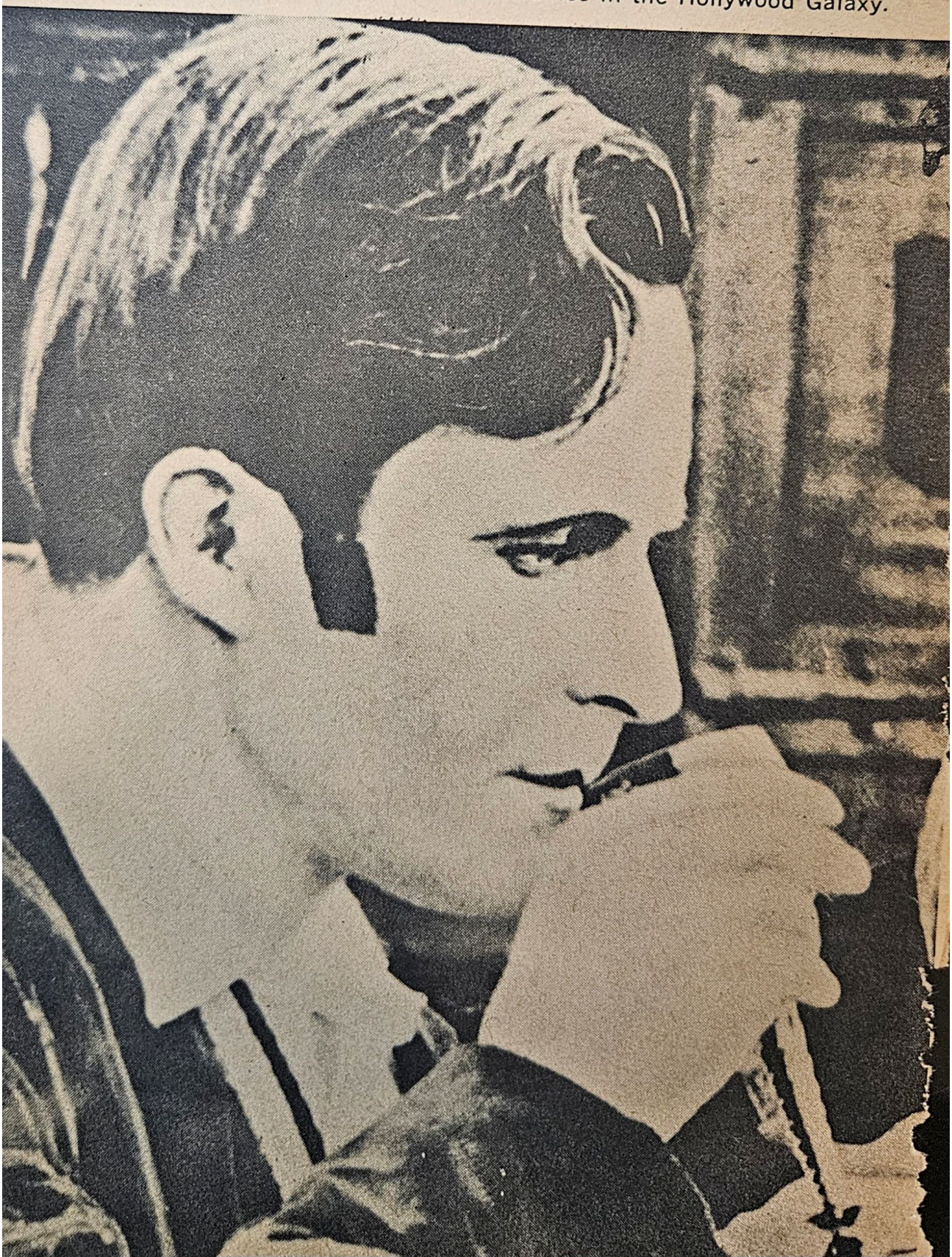
Hollywood was as far out as you can get.

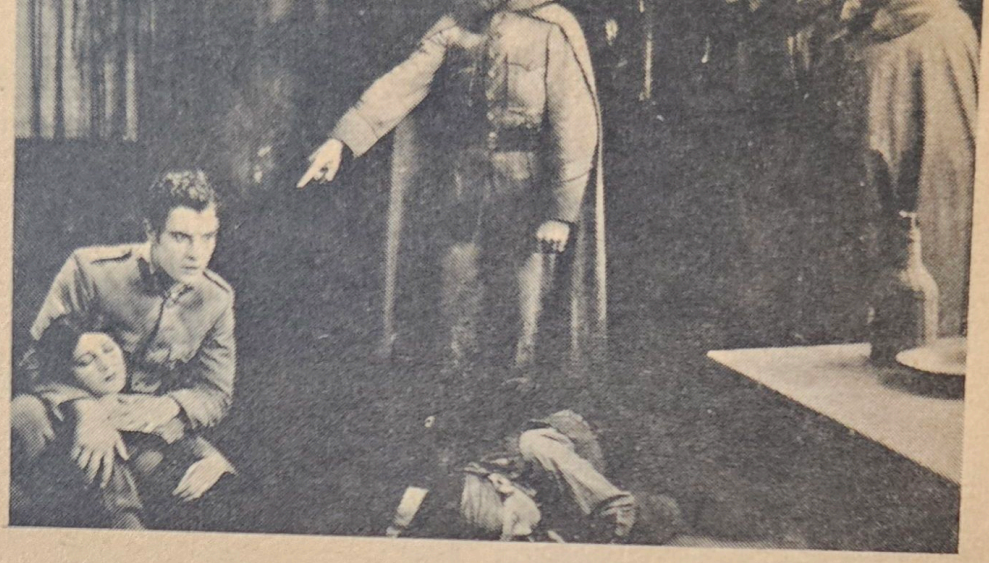
Such was the Home of the Heavenly Bodies. The Galaxy of Hollywood. The Glamor Garden of the Golden People, worshipped from afar.

Mae Murray: One of the Heavenly Bodies.

During the Twenties, by trial and scandal, the "star-system" was evolved. Once the rites and dogma of this doctrine had been established, its cruel rules laid down in a *catalogue raisonne* for Screenland Success, the film industry embraced it as an article of Faith to be thereafter followed by rote.

Director William Desmond Taylor (below), to figure in a later scandal, rode herd on many with star quality. Barbara La Marr (opposite page, top) and Charlie Chaplin (bottom) were Names in the Hollywood Galaxy.





For Lo, the Ex-Junk Dealer declared that by *star quality* would film be sold, would box office be sought, would profits be reaped. Hang everything on the Star.

Star quality was what made the movie-wheels go round. Louis Brazen Mayer never could *define* it, beyond "either you have It or you Don't" but he *believed* it to his dying day. The American film industry always has abided by "the system" and still does so to this day, though the number of names today with "magic draw" come far and few between.

What's in a Name?

In the Hollywood Galaxy, it was once Chaplin,

Douglas Fairbanks

Joan Crawford

Fairbanks, Valentino, Bow; the constellations shifted and the zodiac recorded Harlow, Gable, Crawford and brightest of the bright, Garbo.

What's in a Name?

John Barrymore and Greta Garbo

Rudolph Valentino

Wallace Reid

There was also Arbuckle, and Minter, and Reid, and La Marr. *Scandal.*

The fans could be fickle, and if their gods and goddesses proved to have feet of clay, they could be cut down and wiped out even from memory, without compunction. A new Star was always waiting to fill their place.

Barbara La Marr

Mary Miles Minter

Olive Thomas: A Real Swinger!

The shocking, tragic news that was first to reveal Hollywood in a scandalous light arrived in the form of a cablegram that woke Myron Selznick in the middle of the night. The wire, from half-way around the world, informed the founder of Selnick Pictures that one of his studio's top stars had just been found dead in Paris.

The renowned Hotel Crillon, facing the Place de la Concorde in the heart of the French capital, was a most unlikely setting for Hollywood's first scandal.

On the morning of September 10, 1920, the *valet de chambre* used his pass-key to enter the hotel's most luxuriously-appointed "royal suite." The trolley he was pushing with its exquisite Sevres china, silver chafing dishes containing a hearty "American style" breakfast and single Du Barry rose in a cristal budvase, never got further than the threshold.

What the *valet* saw would freeze even a Frenchman in his tracks. In the soft morning light filtering through the tall windows overlooking the famous obelisk of the Place de la Concorde, a breathtaking specimen of feminine pulchritude lay completely nude — her perfect, pale beauty offset by long brunette tresses and the dark luxuriance of a sable opera cape, purchased a few days previously from Revillon Freres. Her laquered fingertips still clung tightly to a bottle of very deadly bichloride of mercury tablets. The suite was registered in the name of Mrs. Jack Pickford — known to millions of adoring fans as the bright young star of the American screen, Olive Thomas.

Olive Thomas would never again enjoy these pursuits.

Olive Thomas! New York remembered her as one of the most beautiful brunettes Ziegfeld ever glorified. Ziegfeld's showgirls were invariably young, and at sixteen Olive was a poised, vivacious young lady much sought-after by cafe society, the darling of the *Vogue* and *Vanity Fair* crowd, ornament of the glamorous penthouse parties given by the owner and publisher of those modish magazines, Conde Nast. Through the ministrations of Mr. Nast, Olive was appearing frequently as a fashion model in the pages of *Vogue*, and Mr. Ziegfeld had singled her out to pose, unclothed, for a sensitive young Peruvian artist, Alberto Vargas, whose renderings of feminine beauty had caught his attention. Her subsequent departure for Hollywood seemed only natural.

La célèbre et regrettée

Olive THOMAS

que nous venons de revoir à l'écran

DANS

LA GAMINE

COMÉDIE (Selznick)

Olive Thomas by Vargas, 1920: final portrait before a fatal honeymoon.

Myron Selznick and Norma Talmadge in Palm Beach, 1919.

Olive Thomas in **PRUDENCE ON BROADWAY.**

The bubbly beauty from Broadway "caught on" at once in the California film colony, and her pert portrayals of young girlhood in light comedies like *Betty Takes a Hand, The Tomboy* and — inevitably — *The Follies Girl,* swiftly won her a wide following. In 1919 Myron Selznick launched his newly-formed company by signing Elaine Hammerstein, Owen Moore, Eugene O'Brien and Olive Thomas to lucrative contracts. In 1920, with Olive's success in *The Flapper* and her much publicized marriage to young Jack Pickford, himself an idol of the screen, her place in the charmed circle of "golden people" seemed assured.

Owen Moore in **THE SILENT PARTNER.**

The suicide of Olive Thomas in Paris made headlines around the world, and touched off furious controversy. Olive was only twenty at the time of her death — she had youth, beauty, wealth, fame and love — not only the adulation of her legion of fans, but the adoration of Jack Pickford. Jack, in such films as *Seventeen, Tom Sawyer* and *His Majesty Bunker Bean,* had been played up as the "Ideal American Boy" in the fan-magazines; Olive had been played up as the "Ideal American Girl." They were, therefore, the "ideal couple." What could have made Olive do such a dreadful thing as take her own life?

Olive's studio — whose advertising slogan was "Selznick Pictures Create Happy Homes" — was deluged with letters; the American Embassy in Paris and the *Prefecture de Police* promised complete investigations. The revelations of the following weeks were to raise some questions in the minds of the American public extending beyond the untimely demise of one Hollywood star — descending over Hollywood as an entity. By the change of the Fall Equinox of 1920 the chill breath of scandal had been felt by the entire film colony. For Hollywood, the Terrible Twenties had begun.

What the investigation of Olive's death disclosed, and the papers duly reported, was an "abyss" in her private life that did not jibe with her Hollywood-projected image as a Sweet Young Thing. Jack Pickford was due to join her in Paris as soon as he completed the last scenes of *The Little Shepherd of Kingdom Come* — for the romantic honeymoon they both had been too busy picture-making to have at the time of their marriage. Olive had gone on ahead to shop for antiques for their "dream house" and clothes for herself — but it was disclosed her Parisian perambulations had not all been directed to the chic *salons* of Worth, Poiret and Lan-

Elaine Hammerstein: One of a company.

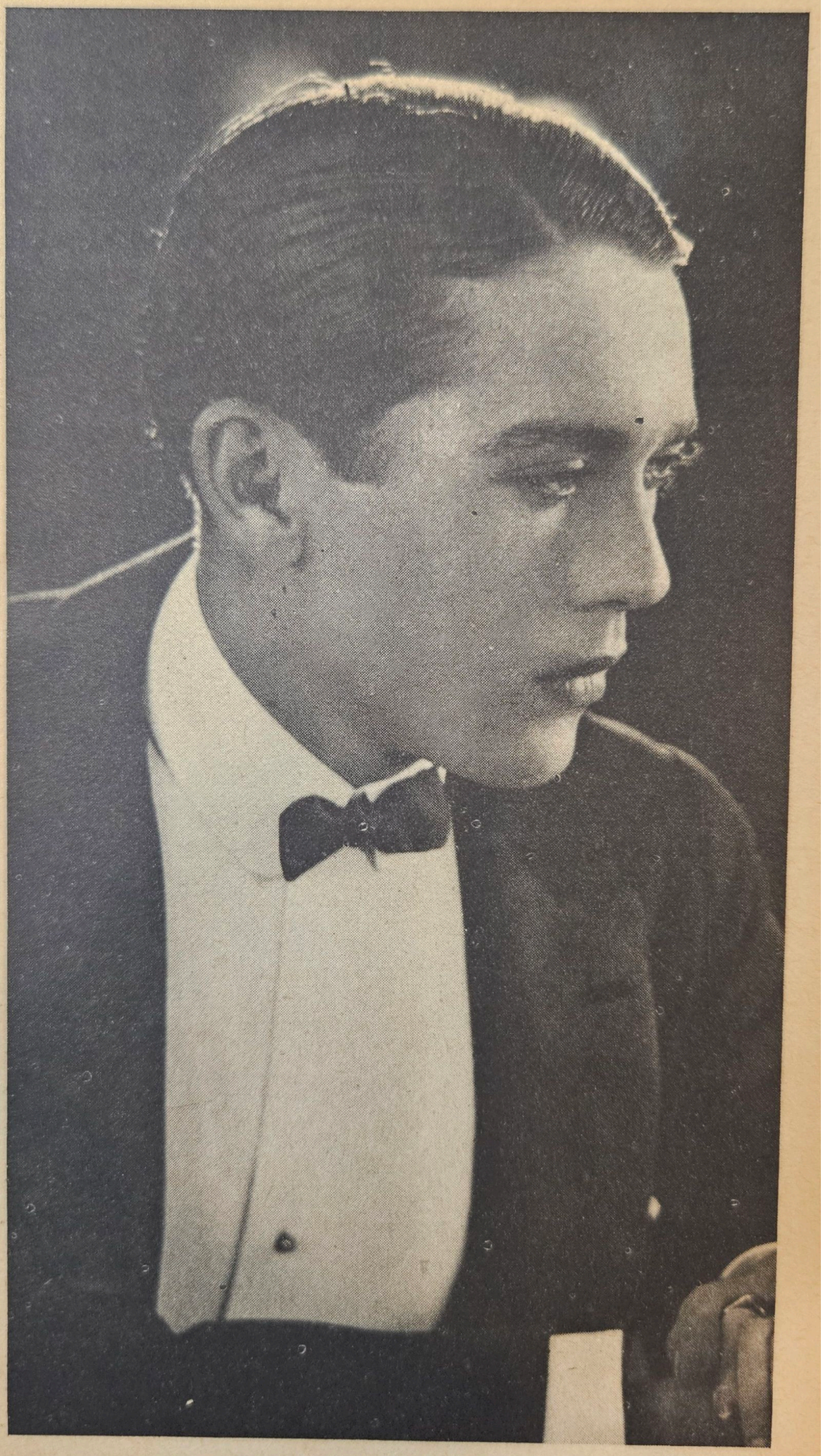
Eugene O'Brien in **SEALED HEARTS.**

vin. The star had been seen night-clubbing at the *Jockey* and the *Maldoror* with some notorious figures from the French underworld; she had sought out some of the meanest dives of Montmartre, some known as the haunts of drug addicts.

A fantastic story began to circulate about the motivation for Olive's nocturnal plunge into the Parisian *bas-fonds:* she was desperately trying to "connect" for a large quantity of drugs to supply her husband Jack, who was a hopeless addict. Failing this, she had committed suicide.

When insinuations of this story began to appear in the American press, Jack Pickford was under treatment for nervous collapse following the news of his wife's death, and could not refute the charges. His sister Mary issued a statement from her new domain, Pickfair, denying such "sickening aspersions." But shortly thereafter, an investigation conducted by the United States Government into the activities of a certain Captain Spaulding of the United States Army, arrested for peddling cocaine and heroin on a grand scale, discovered in his "little black book" of steady clients the name of one Olive Thomas.

The tabloid headlines were black and tall: OLIVE THOMAS, DOPE FIEND! Thus was lovable kid-sister Olive revealed to the entire country as some kind of monster of unspeakable depravity — something of a jolt to the boosters of the star as the "Ideal American Girl."



Jack Pickford: A case of nervous collapse.

A plunge into the **bas-fonds.**

Mabel Normand was one lured.

"Fatty" Arbuckle behind bars in 'Frisco.

The sensational self-immolation of star Olive Thomas was "made to order" for the sob-sisters of the day, who loaded the lurid tabloids with morbid speculation long after her death. Selznick Pictures pushed her films as starring "The Lovable and Lamented Olive Thomas" and reaped a bonanza at the box-office. But for most of America, which still paid lip-service to Victorian morality in the year 1920, the incident was a moral shock. Watch-and-ward societies and women's temperance unions, fresh from their triumph in foisting the legal lunacy of the Volstead Act upon the nation, began to murmur about a menace to American maidenhood lurking in Southern California, and Chicago's Cardinal Mundelein felt called upon to issue a tract entitled *The Danger of Hollywood: A Warning to Young Girls.*

With the advent of the Twenties the California film capital *was* luring trainloads of lovely young women from the Midwest and small towns all over the land. Some were local beauty contest winners — Fair, Flower or Harvest Queens — some were merely pretty, plucky, and poor, and they all wanted to be Movie Stars. Most of these girls never even got close to the movie industry; some succeeded in getting work as extras; a few, by luck or favor bestowed, graduated to the ranks of starlet.

The scandalous star of Olive Thomas shone nearly a year when it was swiftly eclipsed by the glare of just such a starlet — a pretty, young, "Hollywood hopeful" — elevated overnight to national, but unfortunately posthumous, prominence.

The starlet in question was a friend of Fatty Arbuckle, the comic star.

Roscoe "Fatty" Arbuckle was a hefty plumber's helper discovered by Mack Sennett in 1913 when he came to unclog the pioneer movie-producer's drain. Sennett sized up the good-natured, 266-pound

"fat boy" and offered him a job on the spot, starting at $5 a day, working in his Keystone Comedies. Fatty's butterball appearance was the perfect foil for the Sennett brand of screen slapstick — pratfalls in the mud, tricks with garden hoses, facefulls of custard pie.

Beginning as a rotund Keystone Cop in the low-comedy company of Ford Sterling, Hank Mann and

The "fat boy" made $5 a day in his first Keystone Comedies.

his uncle, Al St. John, Fatty went on to team with Mabel Normand in *Fatty's Flirtations,* Charlie Chaplin in *The Rounders,* Buster Keaton in *The Butcher Boy* among a whirlwind series of vastly popular two-reel comedies. Fatty's natural talent for bouncing buffoonery, the broad grimaces and slightly lewd ogling that were his trademark assured his immense success as a screen comic and made his fortune.

Fatty's value as a laugh-maker rocketed his $5-a-day salary of 1913 to a fabulous $5000 a week in 1917, when he signed with Joseph Schenck Productions in a deal made by his agent, Lou Anger. Fatty gratefully turned $1000 a week over to Anger, whose secondary function was to bail Arbuckle out of scrapes when his off-screen highjinks got out of hand. Now that he was star of his own series of burlesque films under a Paramount contract, it was nobody's secret (thanks to the studio press agents) that Arbuckle blew his money partying. The public began to believe him capable of anything.

One of Fatty's parties in 1917 came within a hairbreadth of public scandal. The roaring, all-night revel in a rented road-house to celebrate Fatty's signing with Paramount roused a neighbor who went to investigate. The elderly lady busybody managed to peek through an open transom at the liquor-soaked festivities, and after observing the host complete a tabletop striptease and a round-the-table starlet-chase *in naturabilis,* decided "decency" had been outraged and called the cops. Caught with his pants *down* and a starlet's skirt *up,* the famous funnyman was a perfect patsy for blackmail. Lou Anger worked overtime, and reportedly had to cross many official palms with silver, to chill the beef over Fatty's bawdy flight of fancy.

It was at another of Fatty's free-flowing frolics, four year later, that a minor starlet achieved in-

The St. Francis, scene of Fatty's "bottle party."

stant renown. She would undoubtedly have welcomed the millions of dollars' worth of free publicity — if it hadn't killed her. When the public heard about Virginia Rappe, it forgot all about Olive Thomas.

Virginia Rappe went to a "surprise party" and died.

Virginia Rappe was an attractive twenty-three-year-old starlet from Chicago who had latched on to Irving Lehrman, a film director, soon after her arrival in Hollywood. Lehrman gave her a small part as a shop girl in a film he directed, *Fantasy*, and later introduced her to Fatty Arbuckle, when he directed him in a comedy titled *Joey Loses a Sweetheart*. Virginia's raven-haired beauty came to the attention of Fox Studio when she won a much-ballyhooed "Best Dressed Girl in Pictures" award. Fox took her under contract. There was promising talk of starring Virginia in a Fox feature, *Twilight Baby*. It looked like the lovely brunette model from Chicago — who *didn't* heed Mundelein's warning about "The Danger of Hollywood" — had it made . . .

Arbuckle had shown a certain interest in Virginia Rappe for some time — he even asked her to be his leading lady in one of his comedies — and had insisted that a friend, Maude Delmont, bring her along to a "surprise party" he was throwing to celebrate his new contract with Paramount.

On a whim, Fatty chose San Francisco as the scene for his revel. He had good contacts there for the indispensable "bootleg booze and broads." On Labor Day weekend two carloads of fun-loving filmfolk roared off on a 500-mile dash up the coast highway to the "City that Knows How." Fatty and some film colony cronies were piled in his flashy custom-built car, with Virginia Rappe and her friends in another.

Arriving in the Bay City late Saturday night, Arbuckle checked in at the Hotel St. Francis, facing on Union Square in the heart of town. The sedate St. Francis was as improbable a setting for a "Hollywood Scandal" as had been the chic Crillon one year before. Fatty took three spacious adjoining suites on the 12th floor — with enough bed-

On camera orgies were tame compared to Arbuckle's blow-out.

rooms for any developments. They were all painted gas-chamber green.

Fatty rang up Tom-Tom the bellboy, his bootleg connection, found some jazz on the fancy radio set, and the party was on.

On the afternoon of Labor Day, September 5, 1921, the blast was still going strong, with thirty sybarites swinging on sauce and the host bombed out of his mind. Showgirls had gone "topless," guests were trading pajama bottoms and the empty bottles were piling up. At about a quarter after three, Arbuckle, flapping around in fuchsia-striped pajamas, grabbed Virginia Rappe, who was by this time stoned on screwdrivers. He led her like a zombie to the bedroom of suite 1221, turned to the crowd and winked, and announced: "I've waited five years for this and now I've got you!" They all laughed as he locked the door.

After fifteen minutes, with nothing but an eloquent silence from the bedroom, Maude staggered over to the door where Lowell Sherman, an actor buddy of Arbuckle's, was eavesdropping.

"What in hell are they *doing* in there?" Maude managed to slur out.

"*Fucking!*" Sherman shouted back, and brought down the house. Another card asked Maude to come in the next bedroom for a graphic demonstration. She ignored the invitation.

Five minutes later a scream rang out that stilled the party.

Weird moans were heard through the door and after much pounding, the door was unlocked by Arbuckle. He was King Leer himself as he grinned from the doorway, Virginia's green flowered hat on his head, perspiring heavily, clad only in his pajama bottoms.

The party guests found Virginia nude on the disordered bed, writhing and moaning, "*I'm dying, I'm dying . . .*" Fatty turned toward her and quipped, "She'll be all right. She's just drunk. All she needs is to cool off her cunt." Fatty then proceeded to act out a bawdy bit of business, grabbing a chunk of ice out of a nearby champagne

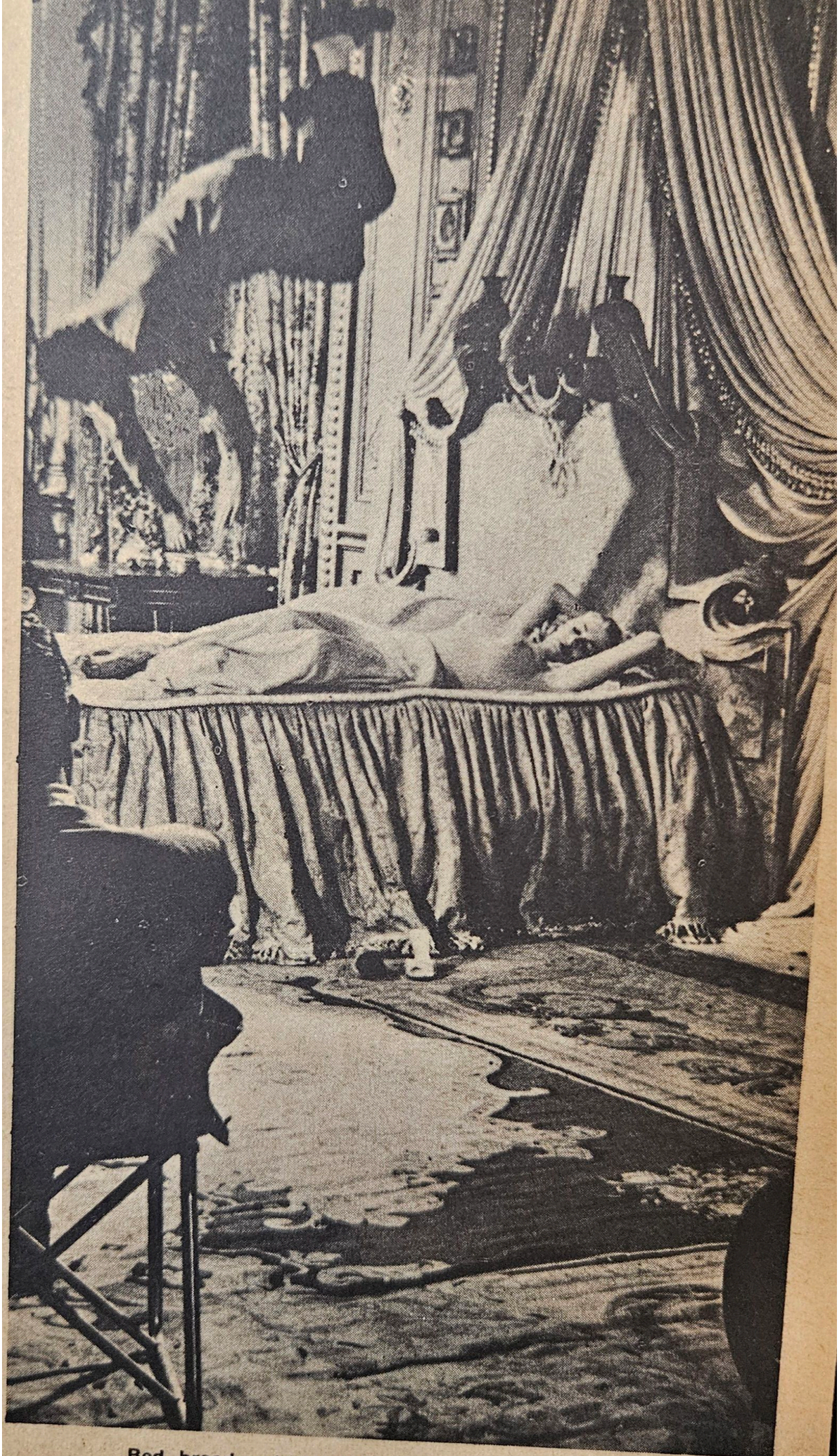
bucket and shoving it into Virginia's vagina.

On September 10 one year to the day after the death of Olive Thomas — Virginia Rappe died, losing her chance forever to star in *Twilight Baby* . . . Fame was to be hers, nonetheless. When Arbuckle was charged with her murder, all the world knew the name of Virginia Rappe.

The shock-waves from San Francisco nearly shook Hollywood to its foundations. As headlines screamed, the rumors flew: Arbuckle had ravaged Virginia with a bottle in the locked bedroom, then had repeated the act with a piece of ice.

The tabloids had a field day with blunt insinuations, and picture paste-ups alluding to Arbuckle's "bottle party." San Francisco newspaper editorialized: *"Hollywood Must Stop Using San Francisco For A Garbage Can."* In Hartford, Connecticut, women vigilantes ripped down the screen in a theater showing an Arbuckle film. In Thermopolis, Wyoming, cowhands shot up the screen of a moviehouse showing an Arbuckle short. As outraged cries from women's clubs demanded a clean-up of the whole Hollywood colony, Arbuckle's films were withdrawn.

An autopsy proved that Virginia Rappe died of peritonitis resulting from a ruptured bladder, but Arbuckle's first-degree murder charge was changed to manslaughter. After being held in custody in San Francisco's grim old Hall of Justice on Kearny Street, near Chinatown, Fatty was brought to trial on two separate occasions, resulting both times in hung juries. In spite of a D.A. who wanted Fatty in the gas-chamber in the worst way — and largely due to incredibly confused testimony by forty witnesses and the lack of specific evidence — Arbuckle was acquitted in a third trial in April, 1922. His jubilation was short-lived, however. His unreleased films were never distributed



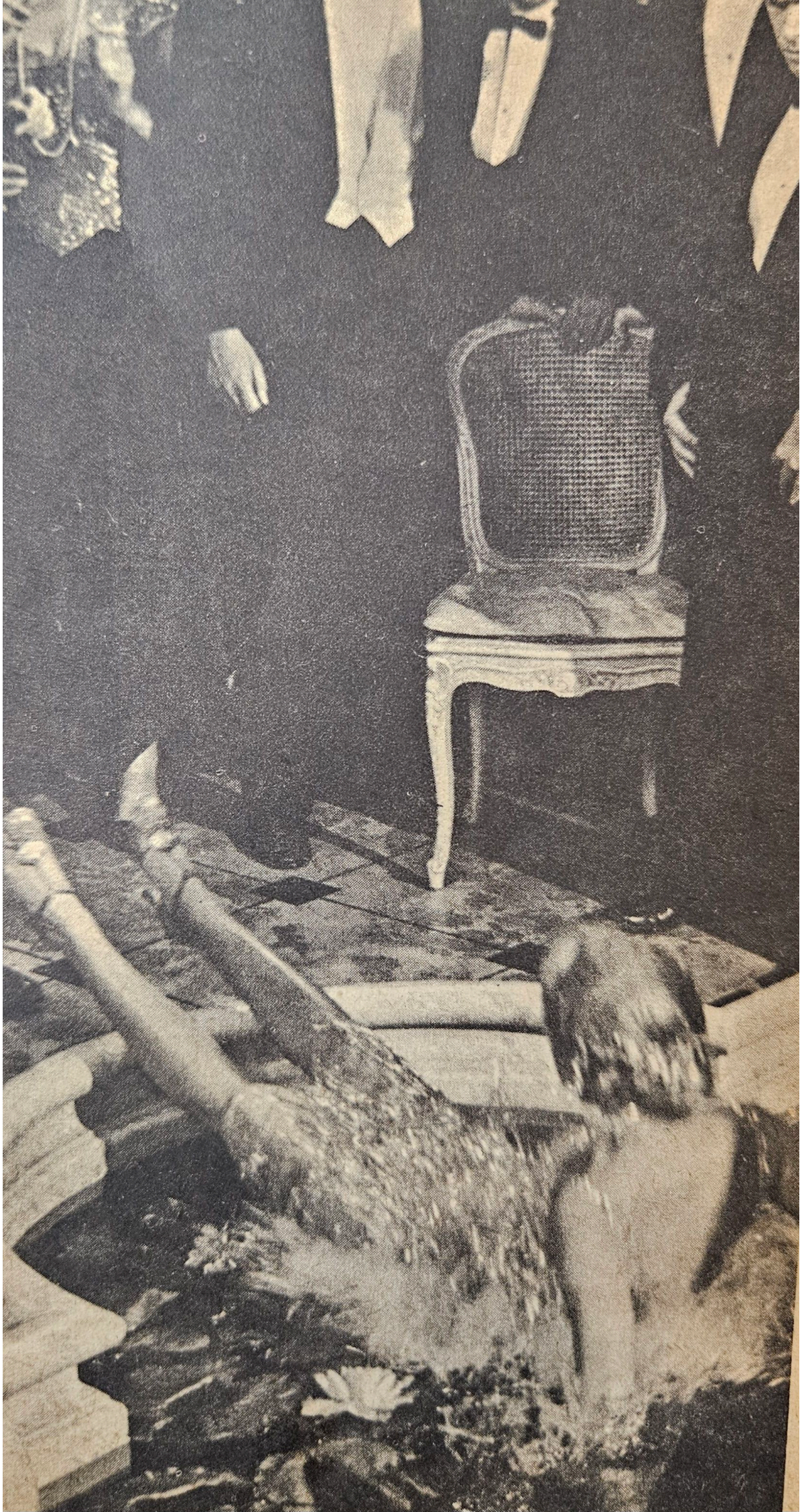
Bed, broad and lots of bounce on and off the screen.

by Paramount, resulting in a million-dollar loss to the studio, and Fatty never again appeared on the screen.

Banned from acting, with only a few loyal friends such as Marion Davies and Buster Keaton — who sadly suggested Arbuckle should change his name to "Will B. Good" — he actually did adopt the name of William Goodrich in later years and gained some modest employment as a film comedy director. But Fatty was never allowed to forget his former disgrace. One way would be the whistling of the tune *I'm Coming, Virginia* when people recognized him in the street. Broke and broken, Fatty died in obscurity in 1933.

Poor Fatty! The notoriety that hung around his name scared Hollywood out of ten years' growth, and Hollywood now meant more than just Make-believe. It was forever linked with Scandal in the minds of millions.

Hollywood was forever linked with scandal. After 'Frisco, Fatty was banned from movie sets.



While Arbuckle was sweating out his second trial in San Francisco — and Hollywood simmered in the glare of inflamed public opinion — a scandal exploded right in the film colony's own back yard.

On the night of February 2, 1922, William Desmond Taylor, leading director for a Paramount subsidiary, Famous-Players Lasky, was shot to death in his plush apartment near Westlake Park. Taylor's career as a film director began with a 1915 serial, *The Diamond From The Sky,* and ended abruptly with a bullet through the heart, fired Bugsy Siegel-fashion from a window. It was another Paramount scandal.

Taylor's murder threw Hollywood into an uproar, while the howl went up around the country at this new proof of filmland depravity. The incident was particularly shattering to the film colony since Taylor was a social figure of prominence and president of the Screen Director's Guild. In his forties, Taylor had a reputation as a smoothie and a charmer, a capable and candid connoisseur of feminine pulchritude. Any number of young lovelies had been drawn to the Taylor flame — the latest being blonde Paramount star Mary Miles Minter, known as "Miss Butterfly."

The press went wild when it uncovered that the magnetic director had been carrying on simultaneous affairs with Mabel Normand, Sennett's star-mistress, and Mary Miles Minter — as well as *her own mother* — equally enamored with the sultanesque Taylor. This "quadrangle" was played up by the tabloids for all it was worth. The papers also insinuated that Taylor had been the cause of the recent suicide of Zelda Crosby, a lovely screen writer for Famous Players-Lasky, with whom he had an intimate as well as professional involvement.

The circumstances surrounding the William Desmond Taylor murder were so bizarre that they have

William Desmond Taylor

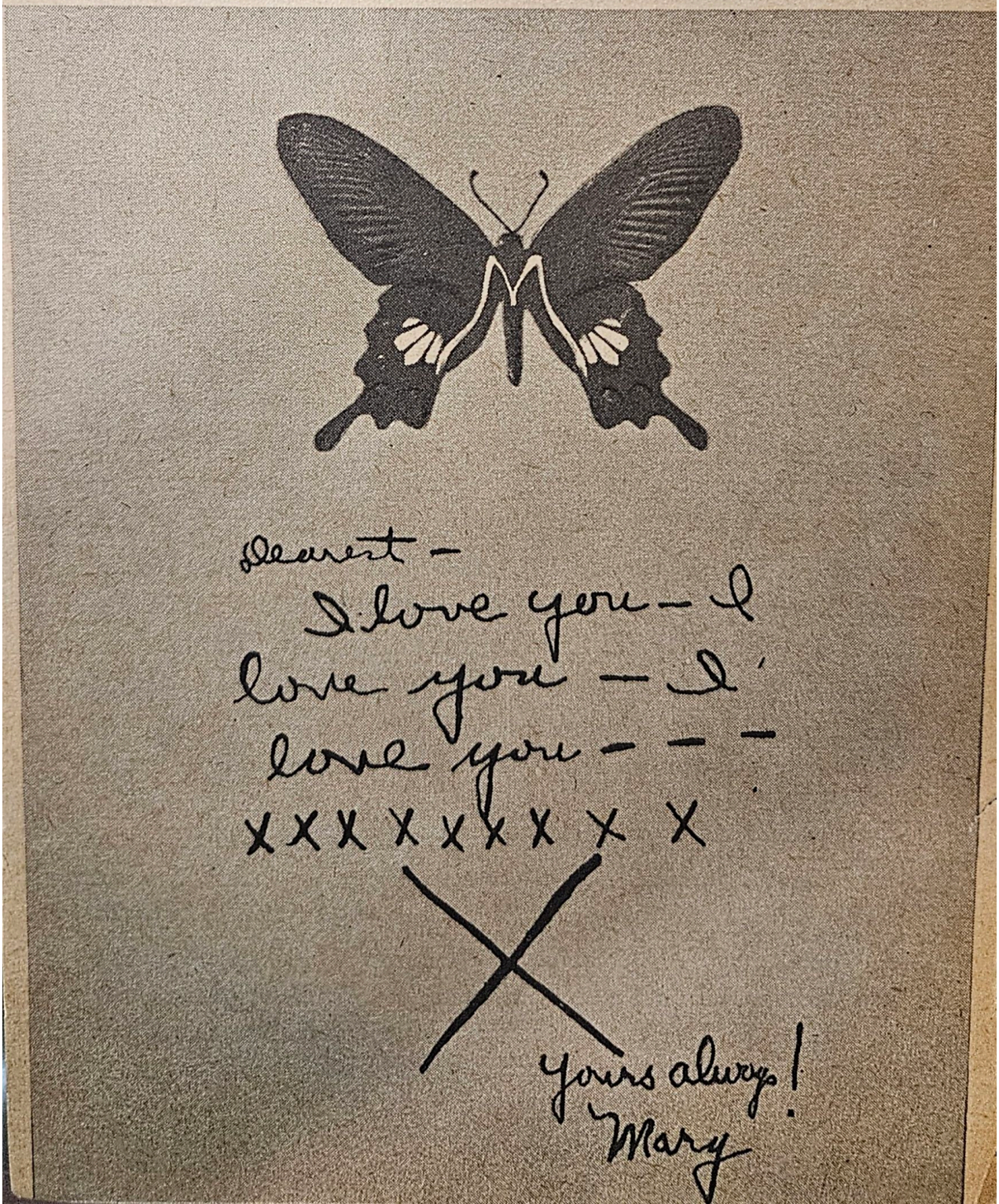
inspired a good half-dozen mystery novels and movie scripts. It was discovered that both Mary Miles Minter and Mabel Normand had paid Taylor a visit, at different hours, the night of the crime. Then there was the matter of Taylor's butler, Sands. It was suspected he was in reality the director's *brother* — a dubious character with a larcenous past, on the lam from the law. With Taylor's connivance, his disguise consisted of bleached hair, carefully coached British accent and impeccably servile demeanor — a touching demonstration of fraternal fealty. Sands, the pseudo butler or shady brother, disappeared on the night of the crime, never to be seen again. To further confuse the picture a witness who had heard the shot and seen a figure take rapid leave of the Taylor mansion, specified, *"the person was dressed like a man but ran just like a woman."* Agatha Christie couldn't have asked for more.

There might have been some hope of clearing up the enigma if it had not been for the intervention of Paramount nabobs on the scene of the crime. Studio chiefs had been tipped off *before* the cops, and when the homicide squad finally arrived at the Taylor mansion they found the Paramount brass in the process of busily burning the director's per-

sonal papers in the fireplace of the study, in view of the body slumped across the desk.

The solicitous executives did not have time to do a very thorough job, however, and the police came across a stack of spicy photographs hidden behind some scripts at the bottom of a drawer. These photos showing "Taylor's Technique" in action with an eye-popping all-star cast helped solve the case not one whit — but they *did* enhance Taylor's posthu-

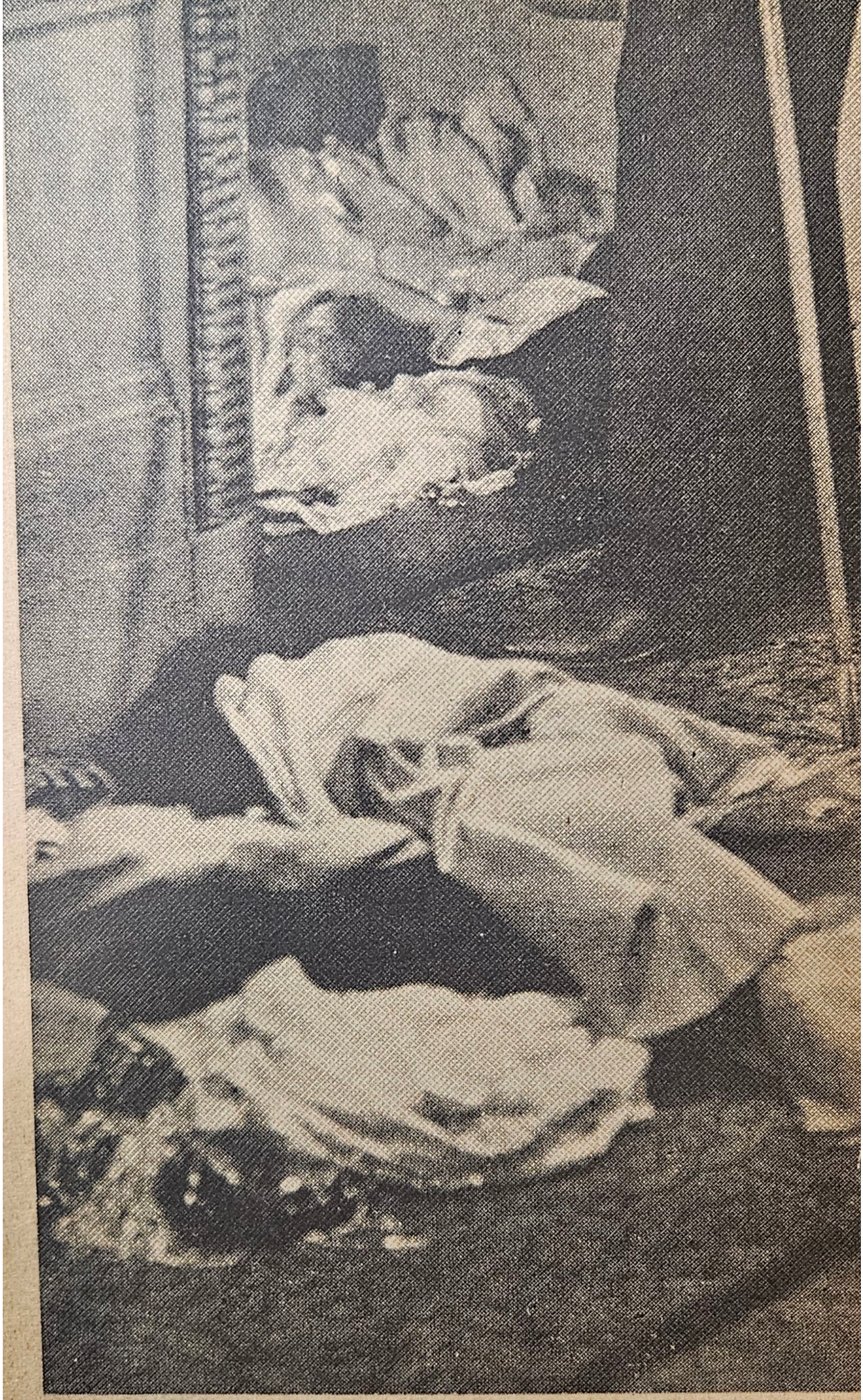
One of "Miss Butterfly's" sizzling notes to William Desmond Taylor.



mous standing as a Hollywood hedonist of heroic stature.

Further snooping in the Taylor abode shook loose a ream of Mary Miles Minter's love letters to the director, hidden among the pages of his libertine library. These letters — ranging from burning little *billets-doux* to lengthy erotic epistles — soon caused a sensation when they were published *in extenso* by the country's newspapers.

Mary Miles Minter: **Billets-doux** and erotic epistles.



Ladies' lingerie in a locked room.

The inspectors also unearthed a more exotic aspect of Taylor's erotomania. In a locked room were found an astounding collection of ladies' lingerie — literally hundreds of frothy, lacy, silken items of intimate feminine apparel — each one tagged with initials and a date. It seems that wily William Desmond Taylor was in the habit of requesting a tangible souvenir of each sentimental encounter with his extensive female coterie. When dozens of "fancy panties" were discovered — embroidered with a butterfly behind, and a delicate *M.M.M.* in front — the days on the screen for Mary Miles Minter were numbered. Her last film for Paramount was *The Drums of Fate*, and she was quickly drummed out of the film industry.

Panties with a butterfly embroidered behind.

There was also a narcotics aspect to the Taylor case. It was soon revealed that the popular Sennett star, Mabel Normand, whose antic clowning made her adored by millions, owed her effervescence at least in part to drugs which had her hopelessly addicted. Mabel's monthly expenditure for "cam" was in the neighborhood of $2,000. blackmail included.

Movie "vice" girls only paid for their sins behind bars.

Taylor The Satyr: Hollywood hedonist of heroic stature.

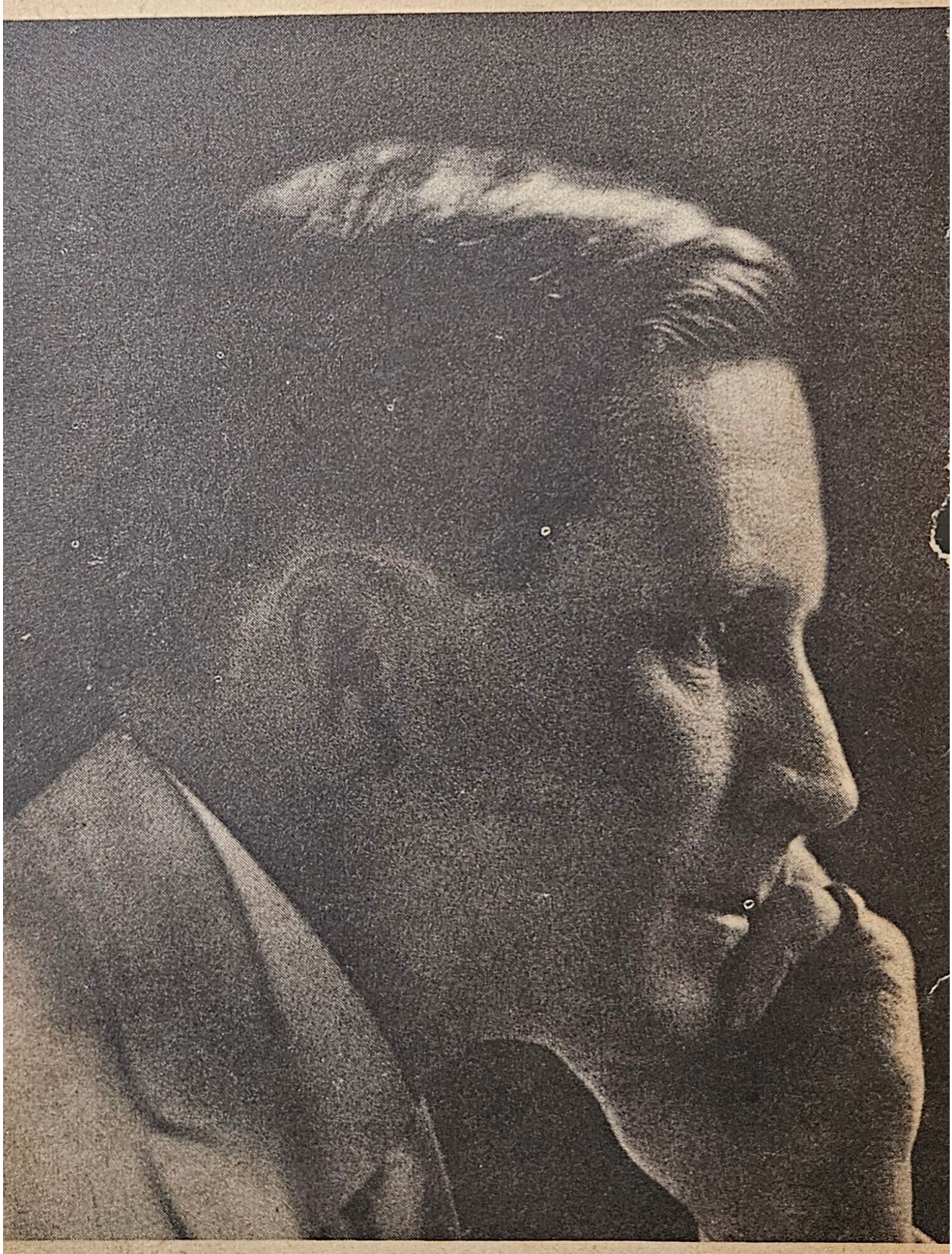
Chester Conklin, Ford Sterling, and Jimmy Finlayson
in a Mack Sennett comedy.

On one occasion Taylor confronted a blackmailer who was hounding Mabel Normand, and in the ensuing fisticuffs laid him out flat. When the "dope angle" of the Taylor case hit the papers, it was Mabel's turn to forcibly retire from the screen. She had just completed a feature, *Suzanna*, for her old friend Mack Sennett. One of the nails in the coffin of her film career was driven home by an editorial in *Good Housekeeping*, which guaranteed she was less than pure.

Mabel Normand's *coup de grace* followed one year later, when she was living with comic star Edna Purviance. During an animated dinner party, Mabel's chauffeur — who also was her lover at the moment — fired a revolver at one of Edna's guests, killing him on the spot. After the trial, which spelled out some of the details of Mabel's varied love life —

Romance on the screen was more than matched off set.

remarkably free of the "caste system" considered *de rigueur* for a star — there was no question of Mabel Normand resuming her film career. The exquisite comedienne of so many Keystone Comedies, favorite of kiddies and old folk alike, was spoken of no more.



William Desmond Taylor's death ended at least one other career.

Mabel's love life was spelled out in court.

The blackmailer who hounded Mabel Normand was laid out flat.

Mabel Normand was simply spoken of no more.

The Sennett star died in 1930, alone and forgotten. In 1935 some of her jewelry and belongings were put up for auction. Included were two of her gold teeth.

Someone — a faithful fan perhaps — bid $25 for these golden, sentimental, dental, souvenirs of the girl Sennett once described: *"as beautiful as a Spring morning."*

Ironically, Mabel Normand had been one of the most spirited bidders when the personal effects of Olive Thomas went under the auctioneer's hammer after her death. Mabel managed to scoop up an exquisite gold toilet seat engraved *O. T.* and Jack Pickford's famous engagement gift — a diamond and platinum cigarette case inscribed: *To Olive Thomas — the only sweetheart I will ever have* — for $1,425; as well as the famous sable cape on which little Ollie died — for $1,800. Show-business superstition soon had it that these "jinxed" baubles loaded Mabel with bad luck — *for free.*

Though Mabel Normand and Mary Miles Minter stood out as the principal victims, *all* of Hollywood's golden people were in for a rough time in 1922 — the worst year of the "Terrible Twenties."

While Arbuckle's legal-and-sex circus played on for the nation's edification to packed houses in San Francisco, the inquest into Taylor's murder in Hollywood drew even *more* cross-country headlines — from the Sacramento *Bee* to the notorious tabloid *New York Evening Graphic* — health-faddist Macfadden's ultimate in jaundiced journalism.

The tabloids really went to town when *both* Mabel Normand and Mary Miles Minter collapsed at Taylor's free-for-all funeral — the latter after she had kissed the painted corpse lingeringly, full on the lips. Miss Butterfly then rose to report to the cloud of necrophilic newshens: "He whispered something to me — it sounded like *'I shall love you always, Mary.'* " The papers made much of this bit of stellar spiritism.

Comic relief was supplied by Mabel Normand — who claimed she had dropped by Taylor's mansion

about her "French lessons." When she left, Taylor lent her a book by Sigmund Freud.

Since Mabel had masqueraded in men's clothing in films like *Mabel's Stratagem* and *Mickey,* and Mary Miles Minter had done likewise in *The Tomboy,* there was speculation that either one could have been the ambiguous personage seen sashaying across the shadowy lawn. When Taylor's manservant who discovered the body, Henry Peavey, was asked his opinion on the flitting figure, he hazarded that it was "probably the pansy who pestered Mr. Taylor on the telephone."

Even "America's Sweetheart" was interviewed about the case by detectives and newspapermen—as her large, framed, affectionately-autographed photograph was prominently displayed on Taylor's desk — inches from the director's staring dead eyes. The Queen of Pickfair could offer little illumination but

Arbuckle's legal-and-sex circus played to packed houses in 'Frisco.

for a couple of hours the night of the crime to talk Miss Pickford said she would "pray."

One actress from Taylor's extensive circle of feminine acquaintances abruptly terminated her film career and fled to Sicily — Miss Jane Wolfe entered the *Sanctum Sanctorum* founded by Aleister Crowley, the English occultist, near the village of Cefalu — soon to be denounced by London's tabloids as a "Notorious Love Cult." Some sleuthing revealed that Taylor himself was a "high officer" in an international brotherhood known as *Ordo Templi Orientis* — a secret society whose precepts included the practice of *Magia Sexualis,* "sex magic" — likewise directed by the mysterious Mr. Crowley. This whiff of sex and Satanism inspired a drooling series in the Sunday Supplement, *The American Weekly,* speculating that Taylor had been "hypnotized" by the "Devil-Priest" — Aleister Crowley — when he was an officer in the British Army to "deliver the Rarest Flowers of American Womanhood to the Altars of Lust and Darkness." When it was further suggested that Taylor may have branded certain Hollywood blossoms with the "Mark of the Beast" between their breasts, neither Mary nor Mabel spoke up to confirm or deny.

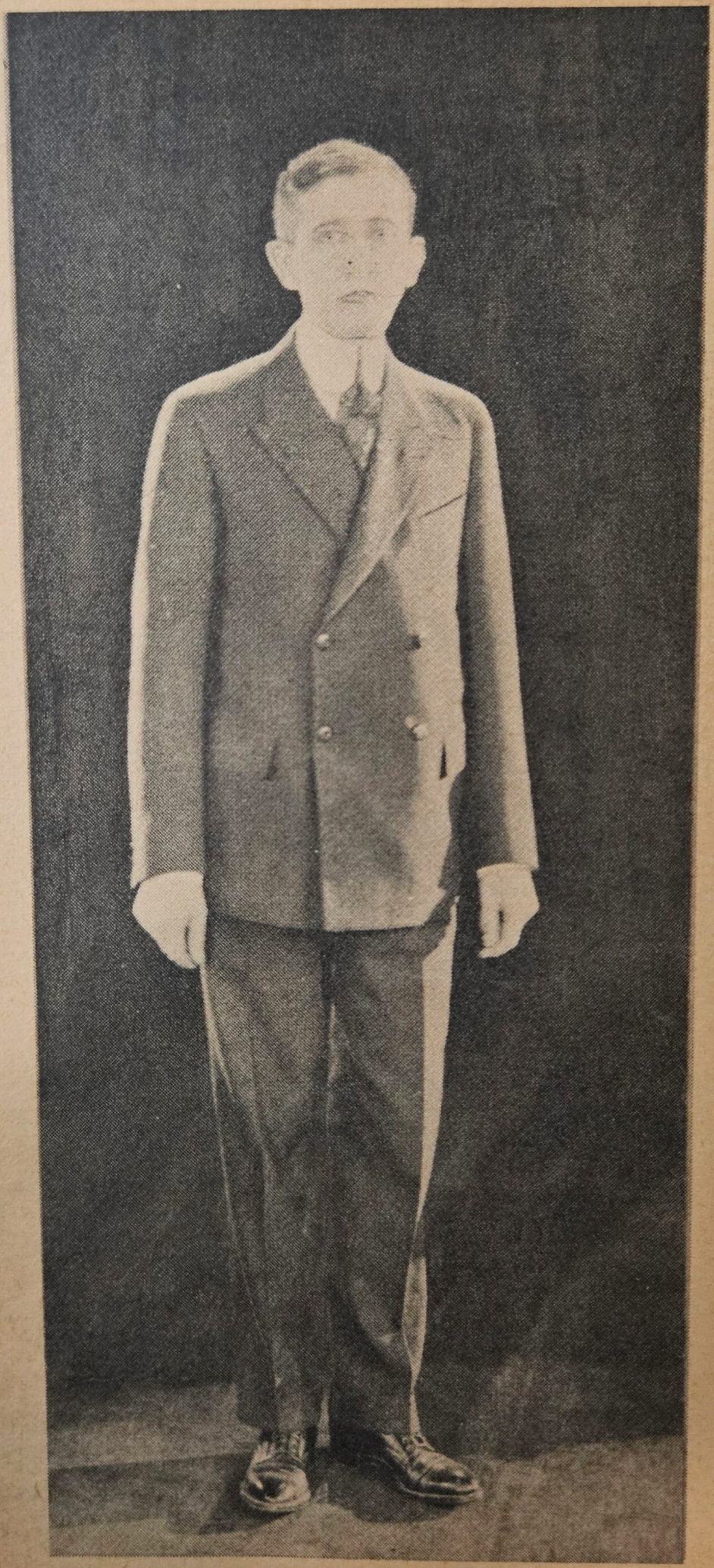
It all made very edifying reading for a Sunday afternoon, and church-minded folk, already clench-fisted over Fatty Arbuckle, called forth God's lightning on the California film colony.

As the uncomplimentary press notices continued to pour in, it was not God's lightning that the movie magnates feared, but retaliation at the box-office. The specter of collective boycott by women's clubs, church organizations and anti-vice busybodies seemed a formidable threat indeed. Since the professional puritans clamored for a film-colony clean-up, something had to be done — *fast* — to improve the industry's image.

A whiff of sex and Satanism.

The "improvement" entailed a bit of showmanship borrowed from another American entertainment industry which recently had been plagued by scandal. Baseball — a multimillion-dollar business like the movies — had nearly been scuttled when a World Series "fix" in 1919 came to light. The baseball magnates found a $50,000-a-year solution to their predicament by making Judge Kenesaw Mountain Landis, a well-known paragon of virtue,

The rarest flowers of American womanhood.



Will Hays, old "Mr. Scissors" himself.

The Hollywood galaxy: Stars, starlets and one-night wonders.

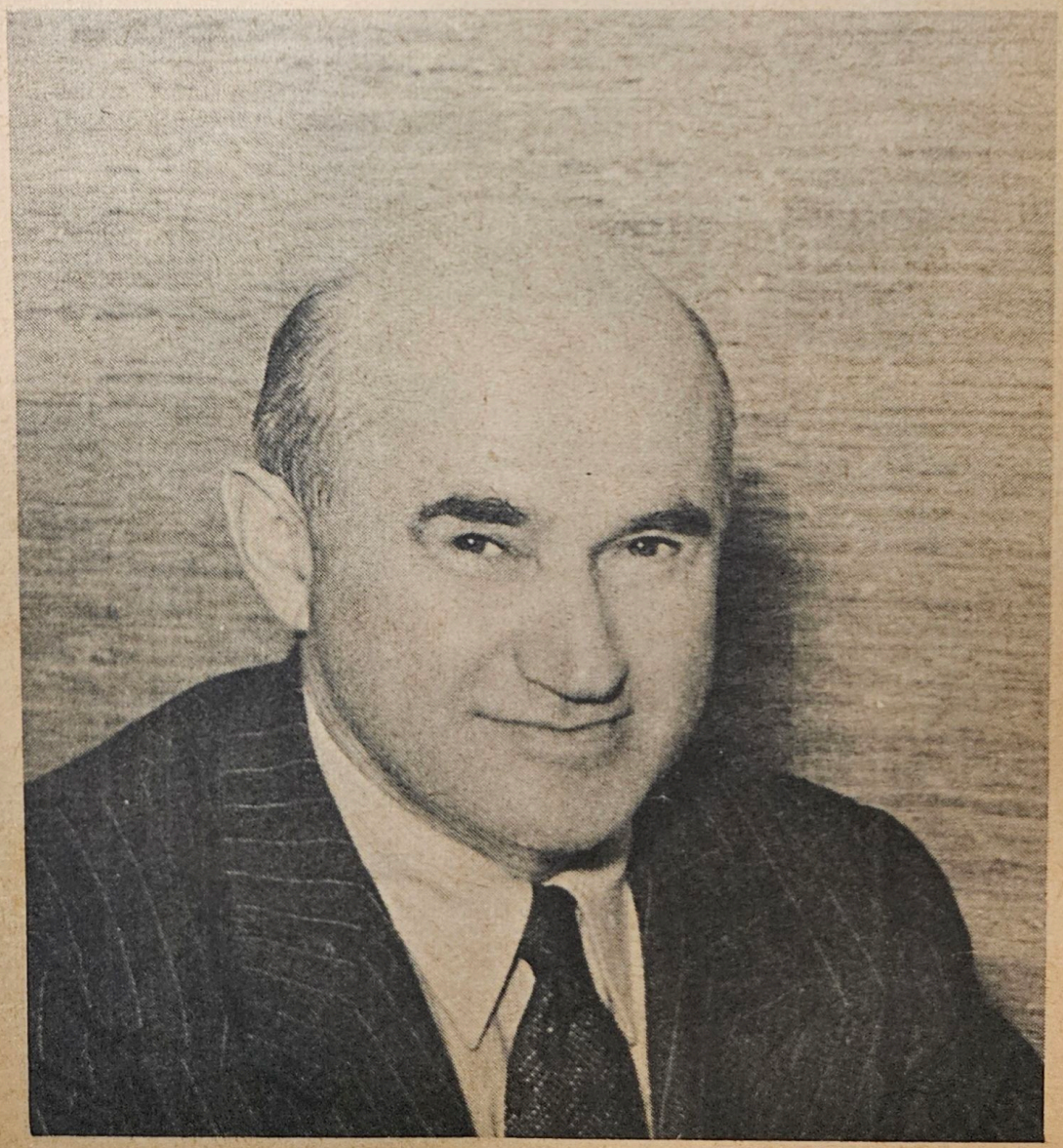
their "czar." The money-men of Hollywood decided it would be worth $100,000 a year to import some paragon to outfield in the morals department.

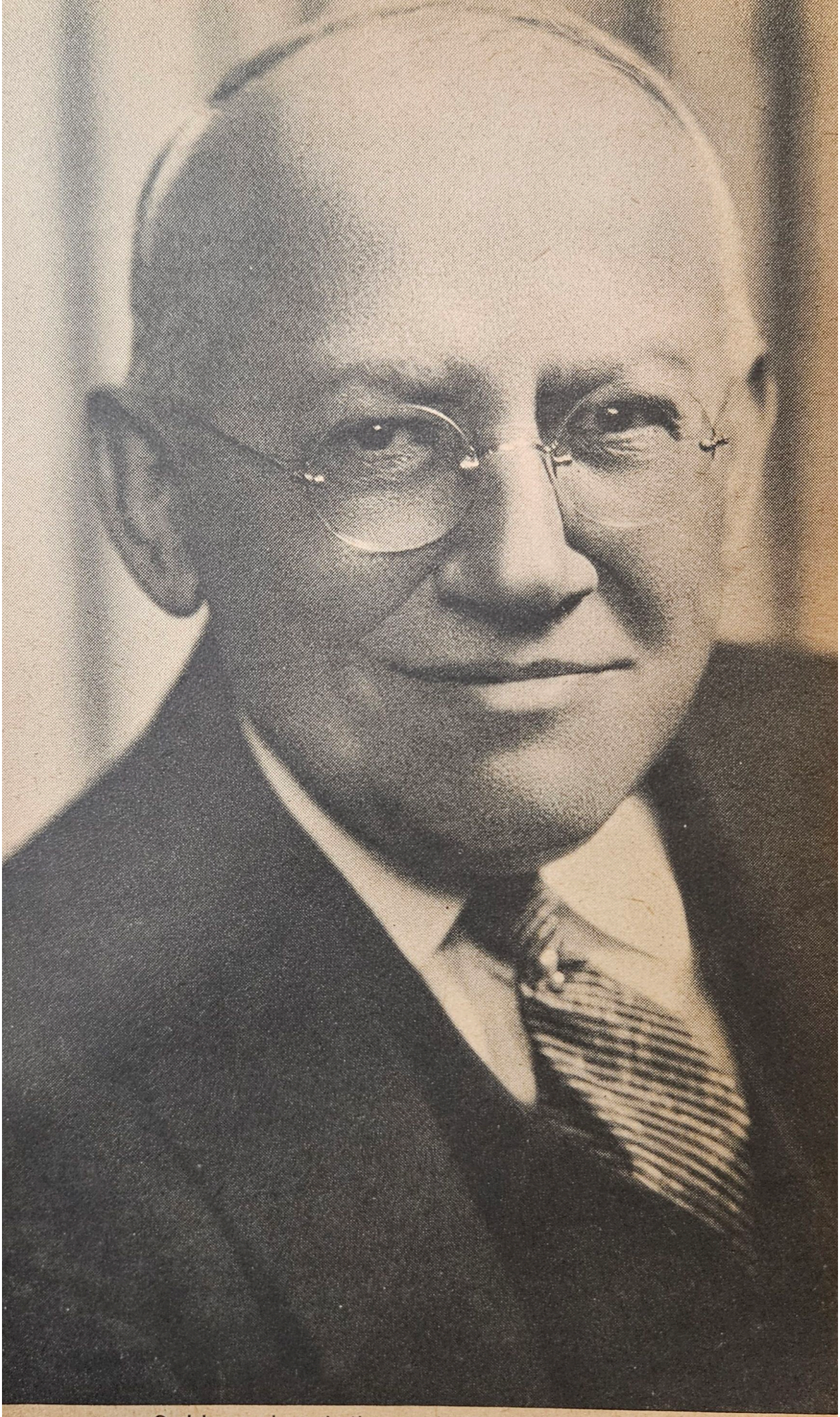
The movie men offered the job to Will Hays, a member of President Harding's cabinet, who, as chairman of the Republican National Committee, was instrumental in getting the hick from Ohio nominated. As Postmaster General, Hays had let it be known that he opposed smut in the mails, so the purity leagues would welcome his incorruptible mien to wade into Hollywood's iniquities. The fancy salary doubtless attracted the Presbyterian elder from Indiana as much as the opportunity to wield

the bludgeon over the filmland fleshpots, as an embarrassing sidelight of the Teapot Dome scandal a few years hence revealed the former Republican chairman had thought nothing of accepting a $75,000 "gift" and another $185,000 "loan" from wheeling-and-doubledealing oilman Harry Sinclair, in gratitude for foisting Harding into the White House. President Harding accepted the resignation of his watchdog of the mails and Hays entrained for the greener and gamier pastures of Hollywood.

As president of the recently-formed Motion Picture Producers and Distributors of America, Inc., with the founding fathers Adolph Zukor, Marcus Loew, Carl Laemmle, William Fox, Lewis and Myron Selznick, and Samuel Goldwyn by his side,

Samuel Goldwyn: He helped clamp down in filmland.



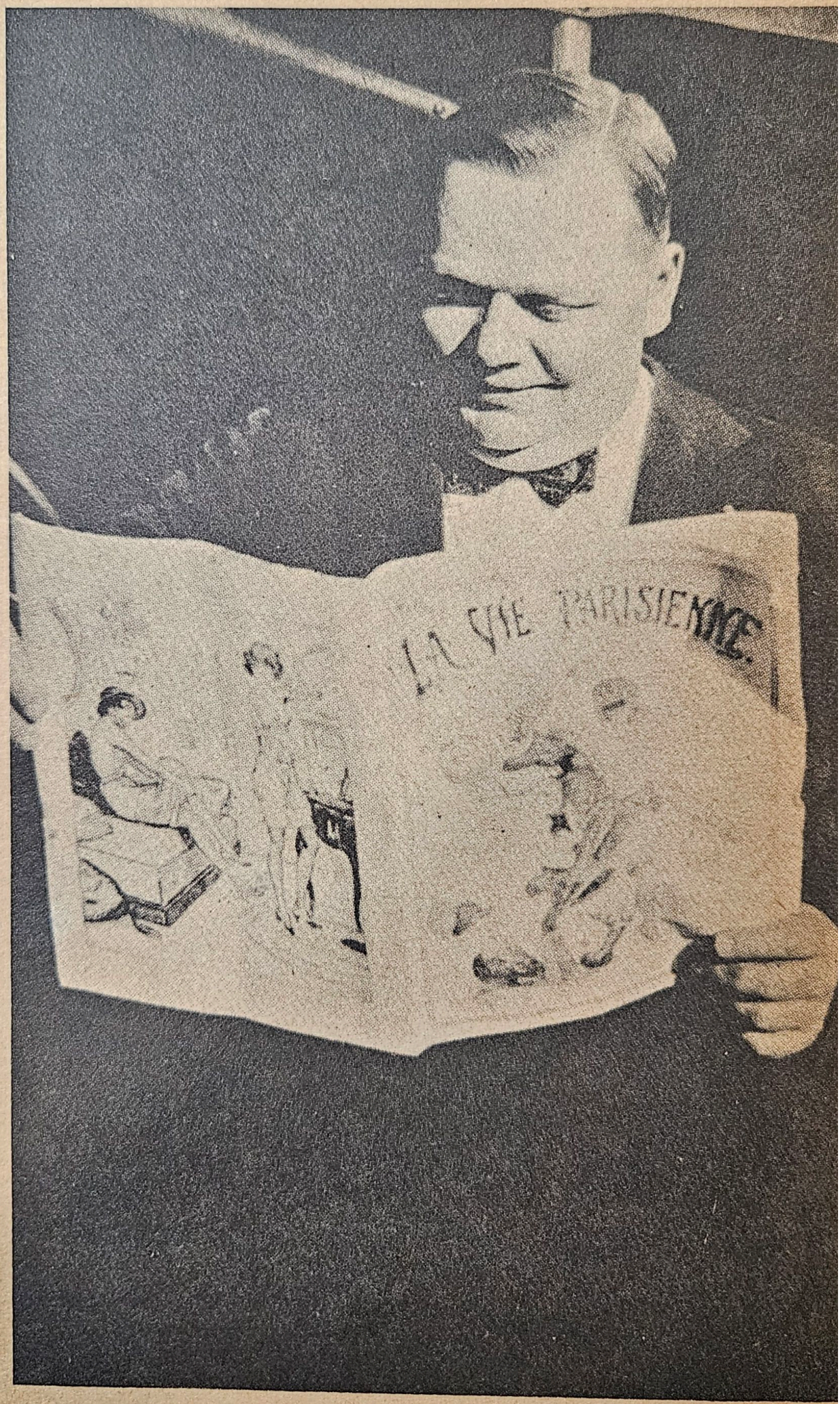


Carl Laemmle and other movie "brass" backed Hays.

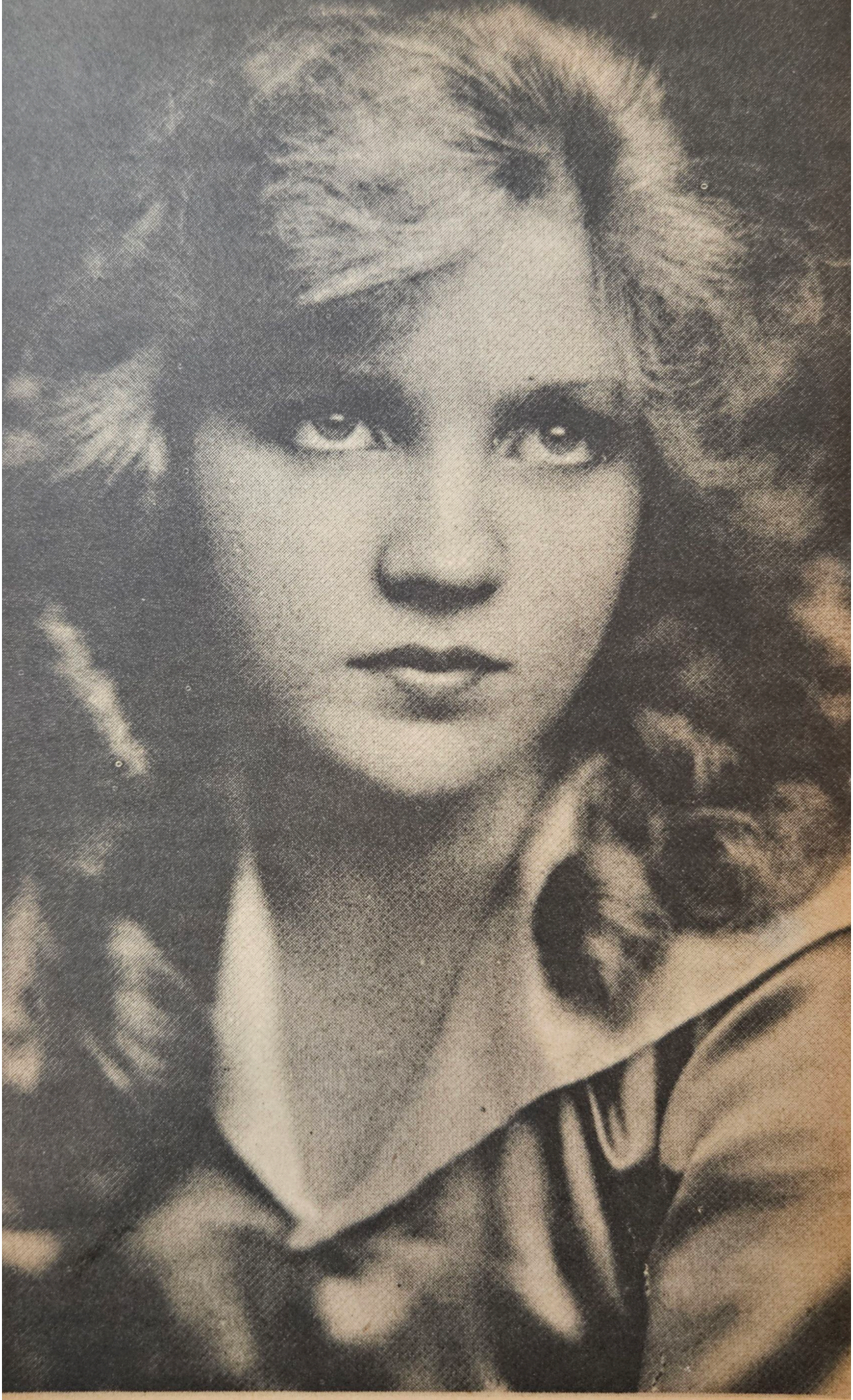
The axe for off-screen film-colony cut-ups as well.

Hays held a press conference soon after his arrival in Hollywood to let the world know what the "new look" of the film colony would be.

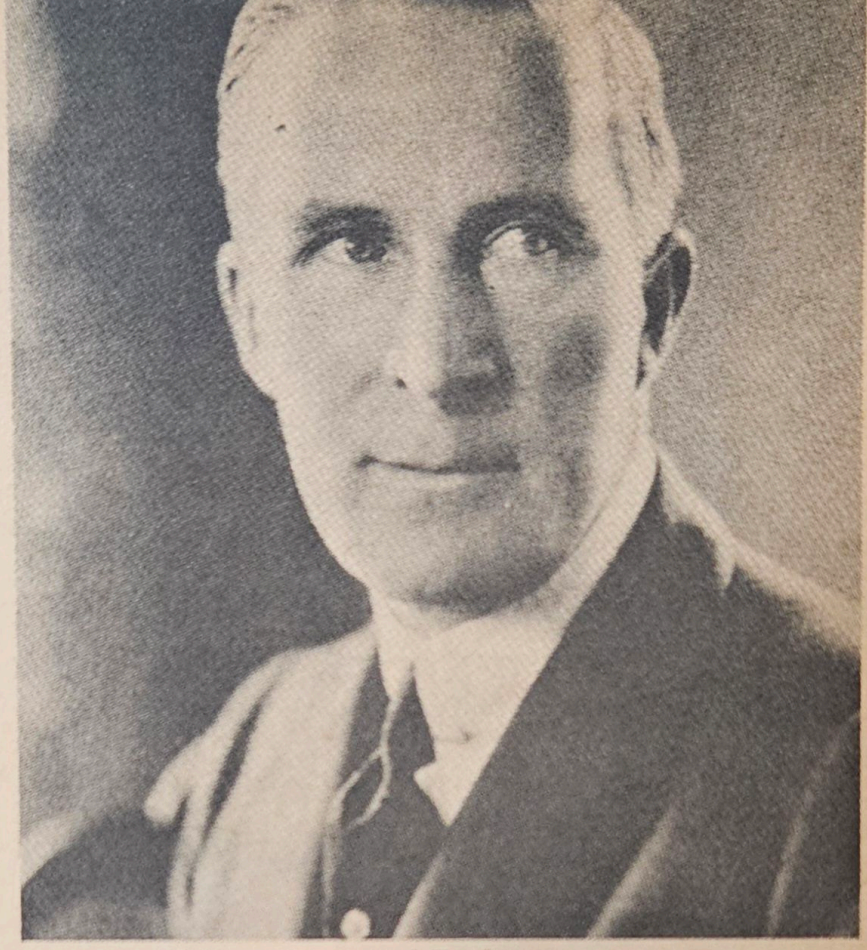
The rookie policeman of movie morals waded right in. After expounding on the potential of motion pictures for moral influence and education, Hays proposed: "This industry must have toward that sacred thing, *the mind of a child,* toward that *clean virgin thing,* that unmarked slate, the same responsibility, the same care about the impressions made upon it, that the best clergyman or the most inspired teacher of youth would have." The Hays Office then issued its first proclamation: scissors-treatment for undecorous doings on the screen, the axe for off-screen film-colony cut-ups as well. Papa



Fatty's name was listed in Hollywood's "Doom Book."



Mary Miles Minter: Her banishment cost plenty.



William Desmond Taylor was gone.

Laemmle was the first to propose "morals clauses" in all Universal contracts, and other studios soon followed suit.

As the movie moguls did not have many illusions that the "morals clause" would make the more flamboyant film folk mend their ways, they instigated an undercover investigation of their own, with an assist from private eyes.

The upshot of the investigation gave the studio heads pause. A Doom Book was compiled with a total of 117 names deemed "unsafe" due to hanky-panky in their private lives.

When the blacklist was shown to Adolph Zukor, the super-chief of Paramount Pictures had cause for alarm. Leading the list was the name of his top box-office draw, a man who represented a walking goldmine for Paramount Pictures. Zukor, whose studio ruled supreme in 1922, had already sustained a staggering loss when public outcry forced withdrawal of all Arbuckle and Mary Miles Minter

Wally Reid

films, bitterly protested the proposed junking of his immensely popular masculine star:

"You should know that you are asking the impossible. Why, it would mean a *two-million-dollar loss* to us to do a thing like this in the case of this one man — a thing like that would simply be *suicide.*"

The movie-moguls behind the blacklist knew

Reid's image was shattered in a padded cell.

there were ways to force the hand even of powerful Adolph Zukor. A short time later the tabloids renewed their speculations about dope in the Taylor case, which had caused the downfall of Mabel Normand, and began to drop broad hints insinuating that Mabel's method for kicks was widely used in the film colony. The *Evening Graphic* led off with a banner headline: HOLLYWOOD HOP-

HEADS.

These rumors were confirmed in a startling manner when the "King of Paramount" was spirited away to a secluded private sanitarium.

When Wally Reid struggled out of a drugged sleep and dimly saw his surroundings, he started screaming. The "King of Paramount" was in a padded cell.

The commitment papers had been signed with a flourish by Florence, Reid's wife, erstwhile featured player at Universal Pictures under the name of Dorothy Davenport. Papa Laemmle, among others, had counseled Florence that Wally's "cure" was a pressing matter. She heartily agreed, Eventually even Zukor and Jesse Lasky, who had a two-million-dollar stake in Reid, agreed it was better that Wally be kept out of sight.

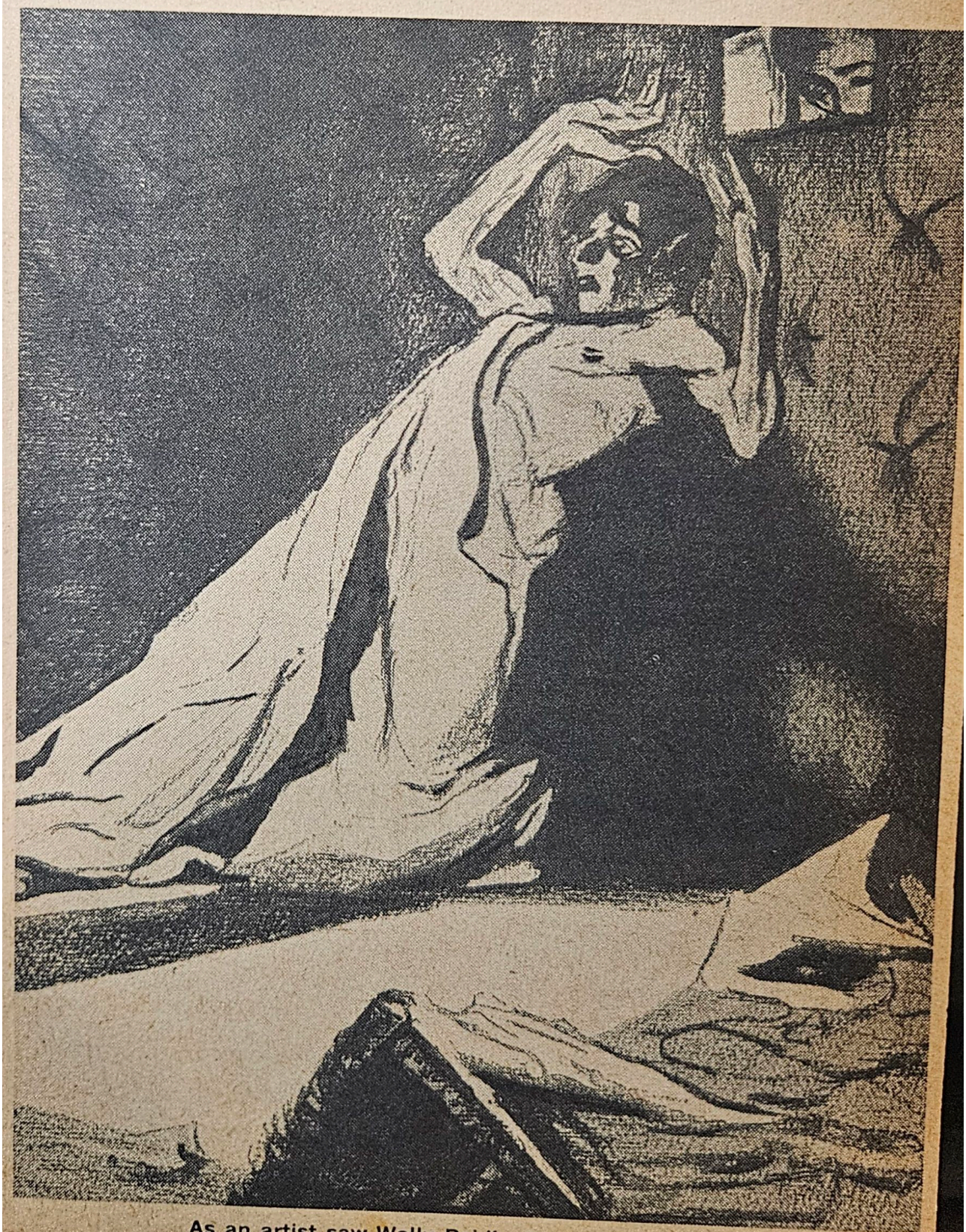
Paramount Pictures issued some euphemisms about Reid's "overwork" but soon no less a source than Mrs. Wallace Reid informed the press that her beloved husband was undergoing a cure for morphine addiction.

The sensational news that Wally Reid was a drug addict struck the American public at large like a rawhide whip across the face. Wally was not just an immensely popular Hollywood movie star, he was the vital symbol of Young American Manhood. Blue-eyed, chestnut-haired Wally was a handsome, cheerful, strapping six-foot-three giant of a man, and he possessed acting ability as well as youth and good looks.

Will Hays sought to cushion the shock of this new blot on the Hollywood escutcheon by intoning that the unfortunate Mr. Reid "should be dealt with as a diseased person — not be censured, shunned."

Wally Reid was indeed dealt with as a diseased person — and a problem better out of sight and out of mind. He spent the rest of 1922 within that padded cell, in the secluded sanitarium — stark,

raving, mad. The sudden withdrawal of his daily morphine "fix" undoubtedly pushed him over the edge, but also the conviction he had been "railroaded" unhinged his mind. After smashing the sparse furnishings of his prison the male nurses left him bereft even of a mattress, and if he slept at all it was on the concrete floor. The padded canvas walls



As an artist saw Wally Reid's death in the asylum.

muffled his imprecations like a mad Nebuchadnezzar against the world at large, against Hollywood, against Zukor and Paramount, above all against Florence, his wife. He seemed to have forgotten his young son, whom the fan-magazines doted on as the "picture of his Dad."

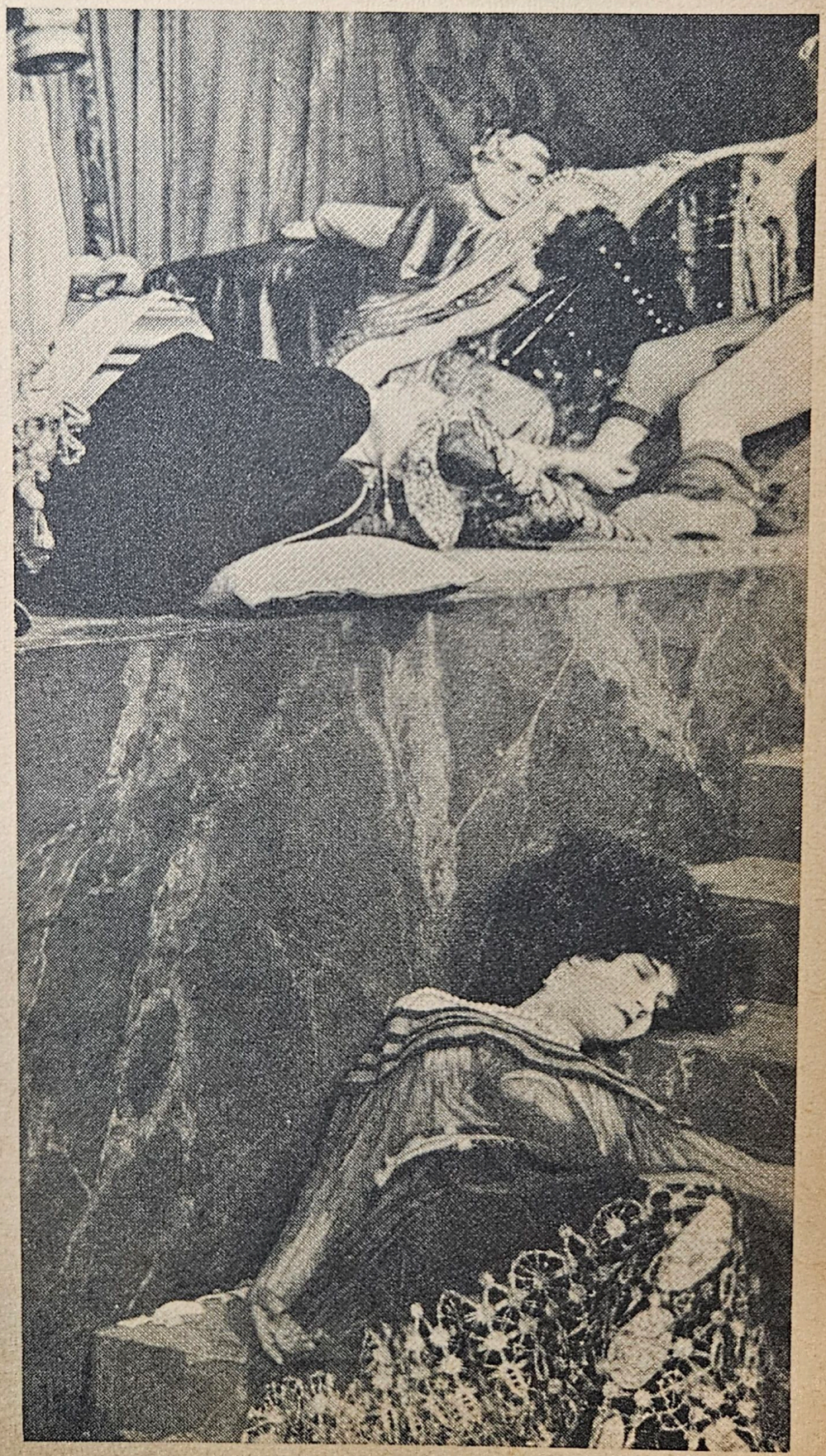
A year before, *Variety* ran a popularity contest that placed Wally high among the "top fifteen" leading men at the box-office, and his youthful following was phenomenal. Young America worshipped Wally as a suave, optimistic dapper Dan, who always made good — whether as a society playboy or a daredevil racing-driver. Played up as an automobile enthusiast, Wally tooled around Hollywood in a robin's-egg-blue sportscar with a horn that tooted "Yankee-Doodle-Dandy." His racing-driver films included *The Roaring Road, What's Your Hurry?* and *Double Speed* — Wally was always expected to win.

Paramount pushed him through a nonstop production schedule of "Wallace Reid Features" that had little to recommend them but the personality of the star. The gruelling pace began to tell, and in 1920, while he was working on *Forever,* Wally took his first morphine fix to buck up his flagging spirits. It worked — on *Forever* — and Wally soon found himself hooked. He could not have been very happy about it, as time went on; whether he was doomed with or without the Doom Book is open to question.

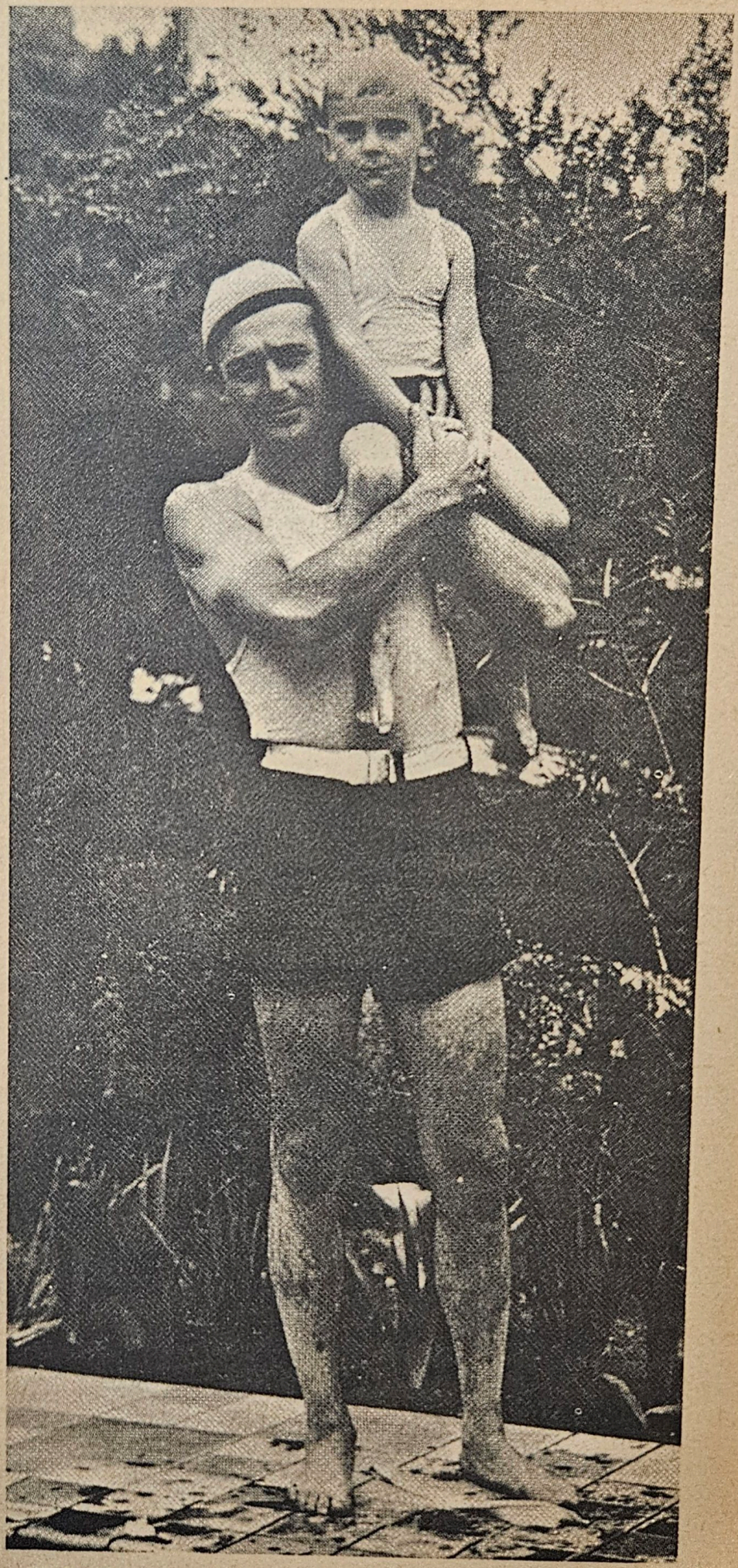
Wally died in his padded cell on January 18, 1923. An ugly rumor circulated within the film colony that he had been *"put to sleep."* Many knew, or thought they knew, reasons why.

With Wally's death, his wife Florence became even more loquacious. She convoked journalists and sob-sisters for the big scene. She announced she intended to "avenge" the death of her husband, and had turned over to the police the names of

the bunch of Wally's friends who had drawn him into a life-of drink, dope, and debauchery. She said they called themselves the "Hollywood Hell-Raisers." She preferred to qualify them as "Bohemians."



A life of drink, dope and debauchery.



Wally Reid romped with "Hell-Raisers"... and his son.

"Gradually, he got to drinking with his Bohemian friends, and soon this wasn't a home" Mrs. Reid explained. "It was a road-house. Wally's friends would come in here by the scores, at any old hours of the day or night. They came, they stayed, they drank. It was one wild party after another, each one worse than the last. Nobody could do anything with Wally. And then — morphine."

Mrs. Wallace Reid also put in a plug for her next film, *Human Wreckage*, an expose of the dope traffic. She was doing this to "warn the nation's youth" as well as "in memory of Wally." She did not mention that she had covert assistance from Will Hays for the production of this very antiseptic film. She concluded her interview as she again spoke of her dead husband: *"Wally was cured, but terribly debilitated physically. Only a return to the drug under control could have saved him. He refused."*

On her lecture tour across the country to warn of the dangers of drug addiction and to launch her film, the clever little actress — dubbed Dorothy Davenport by Al Christie — conservatively billed herself, always, as *Mrs. Wallace Reid.*

Dorothy Davenport: Hell hath no fury.

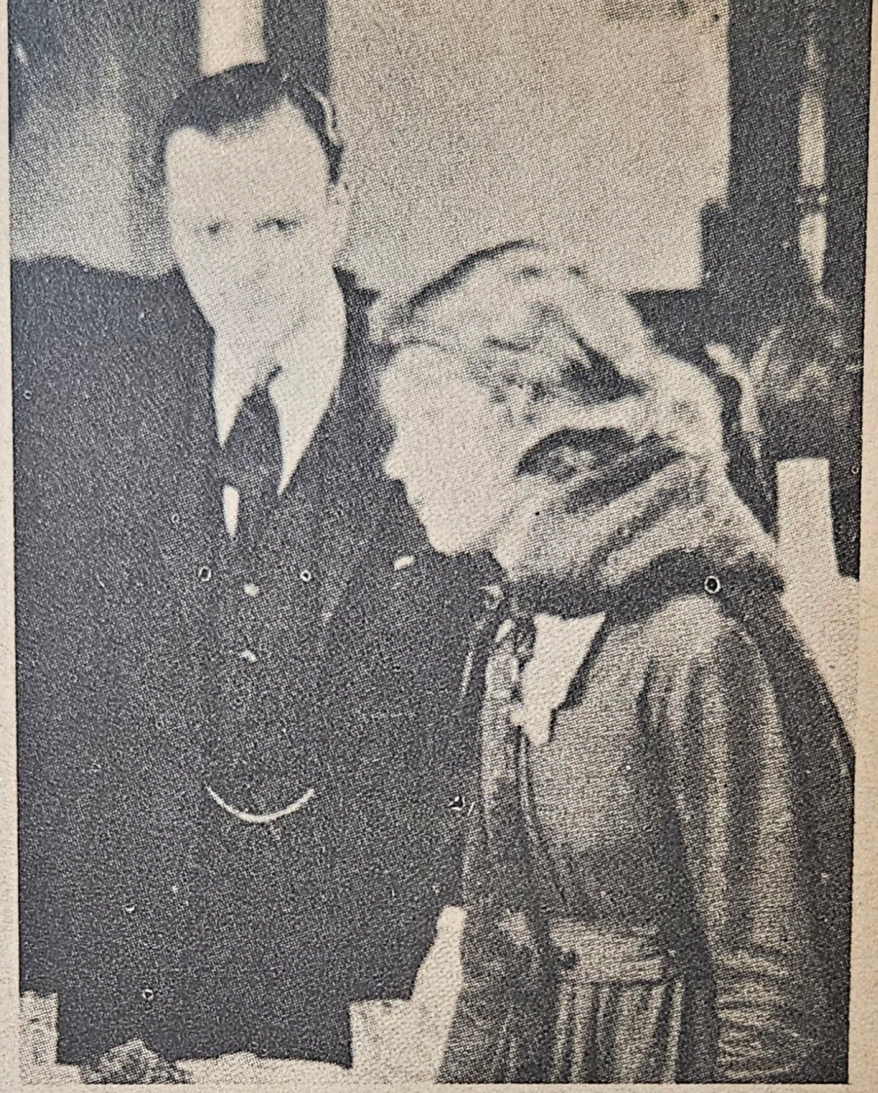
With the fallen idol Wally Reid—dead at thirty—interred, Hollywood's purse-holders wiped the sweat off their brows and fervently hoped they would *never* see another year like the scandal-strewn nightmare of 1922. The embarrassing "human wreckage" was dismissed by Hollywood's professional Polyanna, Mary Pickford, with the epitaph:

"His death is a very great tragedy. I know he would have lived down every mistake he made."

Will Hays issued a front-line communique promising better days for 1923: "*We are traveling the highway to better things in filmdom . . . soon there will be a model Hollywood . . . I have faith that unfortunate incidents will be things safely of the past. . .*"

Now safely of the past.

These nice-nelly pronouncements did not prevent the exhibitors from going to town on sexy film ballyhoo, and the ads assured that Hollywood's canned goods were still pretty hot stuff—Hays or no Hays. Such films as *Woman To Woman*, *Men*, and *The Bedroom Window* promised a peek at "beautiful *jazz babies, champagne baths, midnight revels, pet-*



Lowell Sherman and Lillian Gish.

ting parties in the purple dawn" as well as "*neckers, white kisses, red kisses, pleasure-mad daughters, sensation-craving mothers . . . the Truth-bold, naked sensational.*" Forty million Americans paid tribute every week at the box-office, urged by ads that "*All the adventure, all the romance, all the excitement you lack in your daily life are in—Pictures! They take you completely out of yourself into a wonderful new world—Out of the cage of everyday existence! If only for an afternoon or an evening-escape!*" The masses of the Twenties thought it was a pretty wonderful idea—even when Hays tacked a moral message on the end.

The rule of "Czar" Hays was looked at with dismay by Hollywood's few sincere believers in film artistry, who saw the advent of the Big-Scissors Man from the Bible Belt as an unmitigated catastrophe: "Novels and plays which deal honestly with life are now banned from the screen," they pointed out, "while claptrap receives a benediction provided

While the *Journal* was correct in its comments on the dope traffic, it was wrong in assuming the film folk had any difficulty finding John Barleycorn. Each star had his or her own bootlegger, and rum-running to the Hollywood haciendas was a lucrative business.

Virginia died and Fatty's head rolled.

With the taste of forbidden fruit about it, the movie colony took to the flask with a vengeance, and figured they weren't *living* off-camera if they weren't blotto. Many swigged away in fancied privacy, which was like the privacy of a goldfish bowl. Much of the booze was bad stuff, and Art Accord, the cowboy star, was among several driven to suicide by the threat of drink-induced insanity. Others went to the booby-hatch.

Alma Rubens became a heroin heroine.

Narcotics continued to take their toll, and two of Hollywood's most breathtaking beauties died from drugs during the Twenties. The rare, exotic beauty of Alma Rubens was the first to go, losing her "secure foothold on the ladder of fame" to plunge into the night-land of narcotics. The star of *Blue Blood* and *Humoresque* became a heroin heroine and died from the need of the needle. Barbara La Marr was the screen's most beautiful, if jaded, junkie, and dabbled in every known variety of dope before it knocked her off at twenty-six, in 1926. Barbara kept her cocaine in a golden model casket on the grand piano, and her opium was of the finest grade Benares blend, thanks to a Tong friend in San Francisco.

Delicious Mabel Normand banned at twenty-four.

Barbara La Marr: Too beautiful.

Barbara, the ebony-tressed Southern belle lured into films by Douglas Fairbanks who starred her in *The Three Musketeers*, seemed to know she was not long for this life and she determined to make the most of it. She boasted of *never* wasting any more than two hours on sleep a night: she had "*better things to do.*" She did, indeed, have lovers by the dozens—"*like roses*" she said—as well as six husbands, during her brief career as a star.

Barbara La Marr was billed as "The Girl Who Is Too Beautiful"—apparently she *was* too beautiful to live long, but she found time to vamp her way through a dozen Fox, Metro and First National entertainments like *Cinderella of the Hills, The Prisoner of Zenda, Souls for Sale, Strangers of the Night, The White Moth* and her last offering as a *femme fatale—The Heart of a Siren.* Her own heart was stopped soon after, some said by a deliberate overdose.

Despite the Damocles sword of the "morals clauses," tut-tutting by Will Hays and cigar-chewing by the men in the front office, who pleaded that the stars put up at least a *front* of respectability, the revel in the charmed circle went on unabated right through the "Terrible Twenties."

Olive Thomas was tired of life at twenty.

The New Gods were determined to live their own legends to the hilt—and to hell with Hays and the Mrs. Grundys of America. In the excesses of the stars, entered a cyncism and defiance characteristic of Jazz Age youth, combined with the wealth to carry a hedonistic credo to sublime heights. Bitterness and darkness often lay just beyond, but their attitude seemed to be, "*So What!*" A poetess of the Twenties, Edna St. Vincent Millay, provided a succinct "Standard for the Golden People to Live By:"

I've burned my candle at both ends;
It will not last the night;
But ah, my foes, and oh, my friends,
It gives a lovely light.

Rudolph Valentino: Nestled in a Falcon's Lair.

While their foes fulminated in bluenose envy, the Hollywood In-Crowd whooped it up in an atmosphere of staggering luxury: Spanish-Moorish castles like Valentino's "Falcon's Lair" with its black marble, black leather-draped bedroom—Marion Davies' Georgian mansion at the beach with its gold ceilings, two bars, private movie theater, ninety rooms and marble bridge-spanned swimming pool—Pola Negri's Roman plunge in her living room and Barbara La Marr's enormous sunken bath with gold fixtures in her all-onyx bathroom—Harold Lloyd's forty-room fortress with fountains to rival Tivoli—Gloria Swanson's golden bathtub in *her* black marble bathroom—Tom Mix's rainbow-watered fountain in

Gloria Swanson: Bathing at her place was real luxury.

Mae West lived up to the legend others built.

his dining room—Clara Bow's red satin boudoir and Charles Ray's solid-gold doorknobs.

If Wally Reid's robin's-egg-blue supercharger was seen no more zipping down Sunset Boulevard, there was plenty of gaudy horsepower to take its place: Clara Bow in her red Kissel convertible with red chow dogs to match her hair — Valentino's custom-built Voisin tourer with its coiled-cobra radiator cap —Mae Murray's canary Pierce-Arrow with liveried chauffeur and ever-present Borzoi. — Gloria Swanson's leopard-upholstered Lancia.

It was a time when boudoirs were soaked in Shalimar, when three-thousand-dollar Parisian gowns lasted the life of one party, when sex came served in Arabian Nights splendor, when money came in by the bushel and went out the window by the fistful, when liquor was clandestine but plentiful, and any star could buy the key to an artificial paradise.

Sex came served in Arabian Nights splendor.

While Hollywood's naively exhibitionistic "Golden People" romped right through the Roaring Twenties at a killing pace, there existed in their midst a slight, solitary figure dedicated to — *of all things* — the Film as Art. This man was British, and British he would remain.

Charles Spencer Chaplin avoided "wild parties" like the plague, and he was much too close-fisted with his own fortune to throw one. Yet like Mohammed and the Mountain, he did not seek out Scandal — Scandal came to him.

Charlie Chaplin had been the subject of diverse speculations in the film colony since his early, meteoric rise to big money and world-wide fame. Some of these speculations dealt with avariciousness in which could be traced a degree of economic envy, but the most popular theme for gossip was the *way* this delicate, little five-foot-four man — weighing in at 125 pounds — had with *the women.* Little women, and big women as well.

A "big" woman in Charlie's Hollywood love-life was one of the world's richest women, as well as one of its sexiest: Peggy Hopkins Joyce, who cruised into Hollywood with a three-million-dollar bankroll — alimony from five husbands — in the black year of 1922, just to see if the most-talked-about "sin city" in the world measured up to its reputation.

Peggy arrived in Babylon-by-the-Pacific swathed in chicest black — relieved somewhat by a cloud of diamonds and emeralds — as a young man had just taken his life on her account in Paris.

Her mourning was confined to her wardrobe, however, and soon she and Charlie Chaplin were having a *diner a deux.* The much-married Peggy fixed Charlie with the limpid azure gaze that had won $3,000,000 from five men, and asked him in her babyish voice but with complete Ziegfeld show-

Charles Chaplin avoided "wild parties" like the plague.

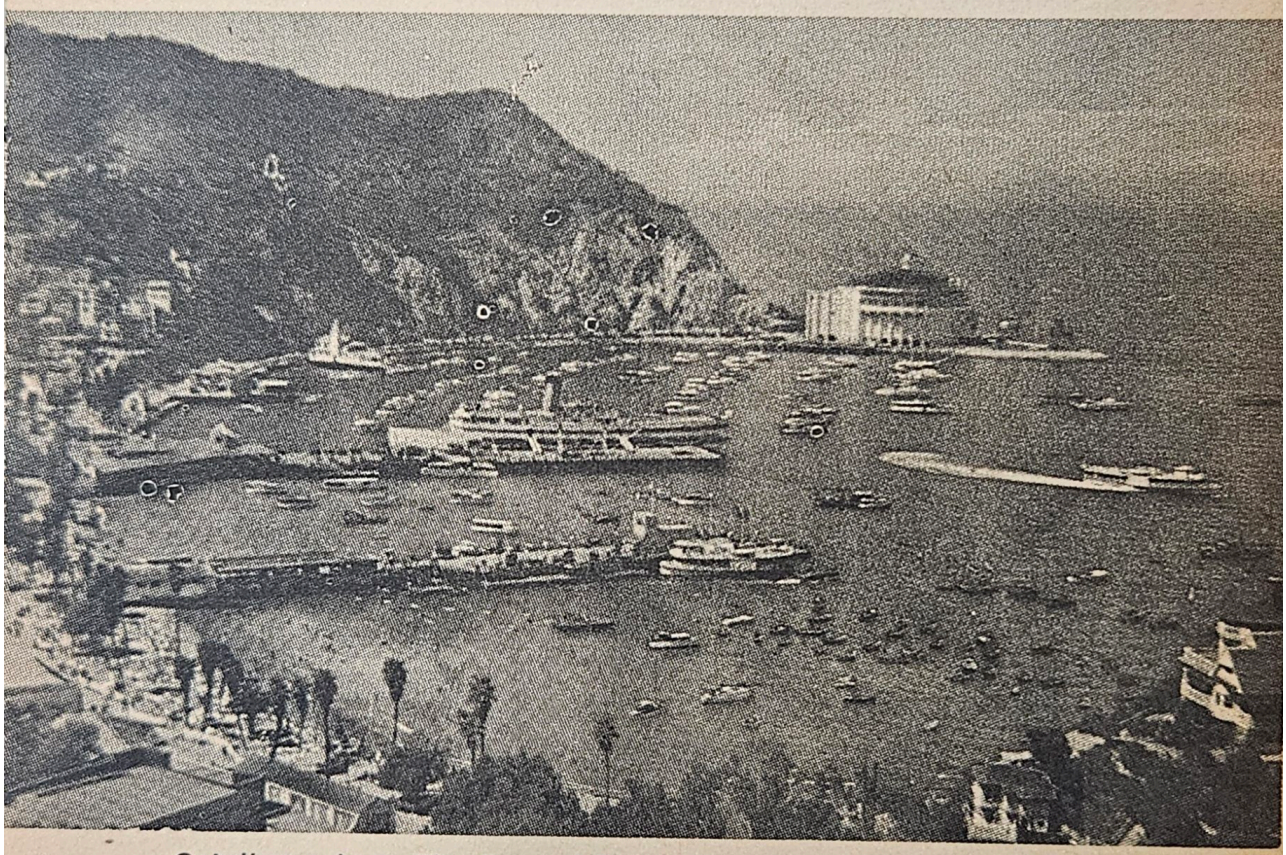
girl candor: *"Is it true what all the girls say — that you're 'hung like a horse'?"*

Peggy must have found out to her satisfaction as the big girl and the "Little Fellow" were soon enjoying a summer sojourn on the island of Catalina, off the California coast — Charlie having set

Peggy Hopkins: "Are you really hung like a horse?"

aside preparations for his film project, *Napoleon*, to indulge this romantic idyll.

Charlie and Peggy sought out a secluded cove on the far side of the island where they could do some nude bathing, picnicking and romping unobserved — or so they believed. As it so happened the presence of the two celebrities on the little island had not gone unnoticed, and several of the more intrepid native Catalinans hiked up the mountain



Catalina, where Charlie and Peggy found a secluded cove.

overlooking the cove, equipped with powerful binoculars — and found it worth the effort.

They verified the ex-Ziegfeld Girl a natural blonde, and soon afterwards the wild goats native to Catalina acquired the nickname, "Charlies."

The "little" women in Charlie's Hollywood career were legion — to the point of being "legend". The first nymphet was blonde little Mildred Harris, who was *fourteen* when she and Charlie began "going steady"; — after they met at a blanket-party on the beach. She was barely six-

teen when Charlie asked her to become Mrs. Charlie Chaplin (the first). Since Mildred had just announced wistfully to Charlie that she was pregnant, it seemed the only sporting thing to do.

As a "legit" couple, twenty-nine-year-old Charlie and sixteen-year-old Mildred didn't hit it off too well. Chaplin confided to Fairbanks that his young bride was "no mental heavyweight" — but he hadn't married her for *intellectual* stimulus. A note of real tragedy was injected when Mildred almost died in childbirth; the child was born deformed and died a few hours after birth.

Their marriage was but forty-eight hours old when one of the pushier of the new nabobs of the studios, an ex-junk-dealer named Louis Mayer, flashed a contract at Mildred and proffered a fountain-pen. The scatterbrain signed.

Beyond a babyish face Mildred was not known to possess the slightest histrionic talent, but Louis the Sharp saw the saleability of the billing — "Mrs. Charlie Chaplin." Such magic had the Chaplin name at the time, that just possibly he was right. The contract-signing annoyed Chaplin, and he took to calling his young wife "exasperatingly feline." Mayer announced with great fanfare that the first feature starring Mrs. Charlie Chaplin (Mildred Harris) would be a saga of domestic discord entitled *The Inferior Sex*.

While Mayer was planning a publicity campaign based on "the famous comedian's wife," the Charlie-Mildred marriage went *pfft* and they began accusing each other — she charged cruelty, he charged infidelity — on the front pages of the public prints. What Chaplin was gentleman enough not to say was that Mildred's "infidelity" was of a rather special nature — often she would leave the conjugal hearth and home to go spend the night with a well-known *actress*.

Chaplin was irritated to the flash-point by

Chaplin's name was exploited again and again.

Mayer's sleezy exploitation of *his* name to promote Mildred's first film, and her second, a "quickie" fifth-rate Pickford imitation titled *Polly of the Storm Country*.

This being Charlie's mood it was to be expected that when Chaplin and Mayer crossed paths, some sparks would fly — as was the case, in the dining room of the Alexandria Hotel on an evening in April, 1920. Glares, then scathing phrases were spewed forth — Chaplin accusing Mayer of meddling in a pay-off he was attempting to lay on Mildred with the break of the tie that binds. When Mayer stalked out to the hotel's lobby Chaplin followed right behind — Mayer turned on him and shouted, *"You filthy pervert!"*

Chaplin *dared* the beet-faced movie-man to remove his funny *pince-nez* glasses — Mayer whipped them off with his left and clobbered Chaplin on the jaw with his right — quicker than you could say Metro-Goldwyn-*Mayer*. A solicitous Jack Pickford uprighted Charlie from the potted

palm into which he collapsed, and led the "Little Fellow" away, dribbling blood.

Mayer — who had learned how to scrap during his rough days as a New Brunswick iron-monger, sneered as he watched them go: "I only did what any *man* would have done."

Then, of course, there is that most legendary of the legendary nymphets — Lolita. Yes, *Lolita.* The first, the historical Lolita, and yes — even if Mr. Nabokov prefers the fable that he *"chose the name because he liked the sound"* — the *real*-little, *real*-life girl who inspired the book.

Who *was* LOLITA? She was a baby born of Mexican-Irish day-laboring parents on April 15, 1908. Her Catholic-christened name, in full, was *Lolita MacMurray.* She was not very bright, and she had no education at all. Of all places, she was a genuine native daughter of *Hollywood* — though she grew up on the wrong side of Sunset Boulevard, amid low-rent, claptrap bungalows.

Charles Chaplin — was I going to write *Humbert Humbert?* — first laid eyes on little Lolita when she was but a tender *seven years old.* The year was 1915, and the place was a Hollywood tearoom, where Mrs. MacMurray served as a waitress.

Little Lolita caught Charlie's eye — she knew who *he* was — *The Funny Tramp* — and she just

Louis B. Mayer: Made use of sleezy exploitation.

stared and simpered and stared. Charlie saw a flimsily-dressed rather lumpy-bodied little nuggins with come-onish, overbold eyes. He called her over, chugged her chin, asked her name — *Lo-LEE-ta* — and soon they were both sharing tea and angels'-food-cake by the hawk-eyed waitress — Lolita's mother — *who hadn't missed a trick.*

Wouldn't you know that before long, Lolita was working as an "extra girl" (*child*) at the Picture Studios, and wouldn't you know that she played a Little Angel — in Chaplin's *Easy Street.* Mrs. MacMurray soon was on relatively easy street, what with the pay-checks coming in for her little girl (Mr. Chaplin was helpful about "placing" Lolita in little walk-on parts quite frequently). She quit her job serving table and devoted herself full-time to the previously neglected "education" of her daughter.

Mrs. MacMurray taught just one course, semester after semester (it was true her daughter was a little slow): *How To Marry A Millionaire.* Daughter finally caught on.

Lolita at thirteen; Lolita at fourteen; Lolita at fifteen — *and Charlie Chaplin never far away.* Like mother, like daughter — a calculating breed, both of them, now. *Why of course!* Why hadn't Mr. Chaplin thought of it before? Lolita had "filled out" enough to become a genuine movie star.

Chaplin was enthusiastic about his new project. *The Gold Rush,* and wouldn't Lolita do just dandy as the drifter-wastrel-dance-hall girl? Chaplin thought so; Mrs. MacMurray warmly agreed. She signed the contract with her daughter who was underage, but not *too* underage, she understood, to spend afternoons and evenings off with Mr. Chaplin who was *coaching her in her part.* Lolita had already been coached, at length, in the part she was even then playing as Mr. Chaplin pulled her

Charlie Chaplin with his own Lolita

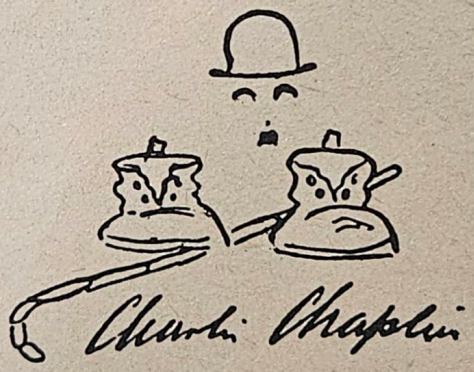
panties down.

Lolita was suddenly *Star* of the cozy cottagey Chaplin Studios on Sunset Boulevard; she even had her name up on her dressing-room door.

In honored filmland tradition, the name had been slightly altered, to look prettier on the billboards and up there on the screen: Lolita now read LITA, and MacMurray now read GREY. "Grey" had been the color, and the name, of an angora

pussy Chaplin gave to his miniature mistress (for such, in full measure, she had become) a short time before. "Grey" accompanied Lolita-Lita to the Chaplin Studio (invariably, also, did Mrs. MacMurray) and *"Where's Pussy?"* seemed to be some kind of private joke between the director and his young star — one or the other would say it and they'd *both* giggle. *Mrs. MacMurray never missed a trick.*

As *The Gold Rush* went before the cameras in 1924, Chaplin shot *miles* of his leading lady, Lita Grey, in the dance-hall interior scenes — it was fretful, tantrumy, and tensiony with Mrs. MacMurray hovering near to her newborn baby movie star who wasn't doing or looking so well. Sometimes she looked *dreadful* — if the light or angle



was wrong, she'd look lumpy, dumpy, and potatoey in the face as she simpered trying to smile.

Then one wearying day, in a crowd scene under the kleig lights, as she tried to tango, she touched her tummy and *screamed.* The grips, the gaffers, the make-up man, the costume lady, the extras, the cameraman, the director-star, producer and owner of the studio (all Mr. Chaplin, to be sure) learned, at that moment, that the sixteen-year-old star of *The Gold Rush,* Miss Lita Grey, was knocked-up good and proper, and a shame it was too, her being just sixteen and all, and unmarried, and sup-

posed to agitate her chassis most considerably in the film.

As far as Mrs. MacMurray was concerned, watching on the sidelines, she had known of the expected "happy event" of course, for some time. She even had *expected* it before it was an "event." Under the circumstances, it was easy for her to scream for the saints in Spanish, and fake a faint.

The subsequent "shotgun marriage" in 1924 was the tabloids' and Hollywood's *Scandal of the Year* — and Chaplin's baptism of fire into the holocaust of the hounded. Chaplin didn't *seek* scandal, but the thundering hooves of tabloid-writers, newsmen and sob-sisters *stampeded* his trail — with his full-bellied bride-to-be — as they fled right across the border, in a lewd, horrendous heat-wave hide-and-seek in desiccated, dust-choked Mexican scenery. They ditched for a moment the screeching newspaper hordes, but Ha! — the hordes found *them*.

There they were: thirty-five-year-old Charles Chaplin getting guiltily hitched to his sixteen-year-old pregnant Lolita, alias Lita Grey, who *almost* became a movie star. The *Evening Graphic* couldn't ask for more! The happy couple were wedded in the decaying village of Empalme, Old Mexico, whose rutty *vias* smelled pervasively of human urine and donkey dung; in the city hall-police station - drunk tank which smelled of dead rat and clogged drain; by the wheezy, fat old justice of the peace - gendarme - mayor who just smelled, period.

As the shopworn newlyweds fought their way through the posse of newspapermen, Mrs. Charlie Chaplin lost her breakfast: the remains of a hot tamale. A skeletal yellow dog promptly appeared and gobbled the vomit up. The bridegroom, the writers reported — with a dig in the ribs a yard wide to their readers — looked slightly *grey*.

Parrying the barrage of impertinent questions with mumbles and wan smiles as they pushed through the jostling gang of gazetteers to reach the idling Chaplin limousine, the now-notorious newlyweds "cut out" with all the alacrity of a stickup-man's getaway — scattering newshounds as well as starving dogs — *when all they had done was make it legal.*

While the bridled groom and his teenage giglet were border-bound, a fast-working Hearst feature writer bought up the local line and was phoning in his "exclusive" on the Chaplin paper-chase across the Mexican badlands and the hasty hitching-ceremony in Empale.

When the headlines of "Charlie and His Child Bride" hit the nation, little Lita Grey — a type in Chaplin's *Easy Street,* glimpsed again in *The Kid,* with a few scenes taken for a leading role in *The Gold Rush* — was as well known as any Hollywood star, but her career on the silver sheet ended with her pregnancy.

Retirement, however, was to offer "compensations." Mama MacMurray was already assiduously at work behind the scenes to assure that the silver screen which eluded her little girl would be replaced by something much more solid — in twenty-four-carat gold. Charlie Chaplin was said to be worth five million dollars in 1924 . . .

With his knocked-up nymphet leading lady — and belated bride — sulking by his side, the foremost figure of the 1924 entertainment world sped towards his filmland fief, a newly-built Italianate villa cresting a prominence of Beverly Hills, pondering his predicament. With Mrs. MacMurray's showdown alternative of sunny California prison bars (just a little charge of dallying with a fifteen-year-old girl — *a statutory rape rap* not to be taken lightly in 1924) or a golden wedding band, *pronto,* for her expecting daughter, a soured Chaplin had

chosen the latter; not liking it at all.

As the limousine rounded the private drive leading up his hillside domain to his tasteful new home — the "Man's Castle" that lay ahead — he reflected he'd make the best of his predicament; keep Lita away in the house during the rest of her pregnancy; find a *new* girl for the dance-hall role in *The Gold Rush* and begin again from scratch . . .

Lolita had been complaining of colic since the Mexican marriage-go-round (a slight case of "Montezuma's Revenge" doubtless due to tainted tamales), so any pretense of bride-and-groom threshold-crossing ceremonies was canceled by her capriole to the closest Water-Closet.

The foredoomed groom had hardly crossed the threshold and was distractedly trying to see what the non-plussed and hedging butler was driving at — when he saw a sight guaranteed to geld any newlywed: his mother-in-law (Blackmail Bessie MacMurray) right there in his own home — his "Man's Castle"—*and acting very much at home* . . .

Mrs. MacMurray *was*, in fact, from her point of view, "at home." She had showed up at the door during the host's absence with a carpetbag, had brazened her way past the baffled butler, cased the joint, picked out a choice room and installed herself, squatter-style . . .

Ostensibly present to "assist" her young daughter through her pregnancy, Chaplin's "Man's Castle" had a permanent "Mother-In-Law Problem" with a built-in petticoat rule for *two harrowing years* — until *both* mother and daughter had hapless Charlie by the balls — so that *in desperation he moved out* . . .

With the filing of the divorce suit against him at the end of those two years, in 1926, the diabolic "mother-daughter plot" at last began to dawn on Chaplin, but by then it was too late. The mother-daughter team had a very *tight* grip on his "treas-

ures" and relinquished their dual squeeze only after they had milked Charlie for the sum of *one million dollars* . . .

During those two years — with doltish, endearing little Lolita swiftly transformed into a vicious, rasping Xanthippe, stage-managed by a prying, devious and demanding Gorgon of a mother-in-law always on the scene — the unhappy Chaplin's *every move, every exit and entrance that smacked however remotely of peccadillo, every off-hand free-thinking remark, even the most intimate sexual suggestions shared with his wife in the supposedly sacrosanct conjugal bed,* were dutifully reported by daughter and recorded by mother, in full, in every detail and with date: in a great big grey business ledger.

Mrs. MacMurray's fine, precise penmanship paid a cool million-buck premium when she decided she had "quite enough," called the curtain on the marital farce, and turned the grey ledger over to a very cagey lawyer. She could have picked someone less brilliant, as with *that* ledger, the job was cut out for him.

When Chaplin fled his termagant-terrorized, harridan-haunted home in 1926, interrupted work on *The Circus* and escaped to New York — only to be bowled over by a serious nervous breakdown upon arrival, requiring twenty-four hour surveillance under a doctor's care for two weeks as he teetered on the abyss of madness, he did not know that even then, his wife, mother-in-law and lawyer were working with a team of legal experts to distill the essential poison from the loaded ledger.

As he was restored to sanity by the devoted ministrations of a few faithful friends, neither he, nor they, could imagine that the entire country would be inundated by salacious reading matter derived from his two years of marital hell.

Yet a few months later, when Charlie was on the

road to righting his nuptial-negated equilibrium, sharp cookies around the nation began to hear of some *really* hot stuff available — under the counter — for a stiff ten bucks the copy.

The asking price for the slim edition did not prevent the little item — *Complaint by Lita Grey* — from leading the underground "dirty book best seller list" for 1927. The wise guys and Joe College sex sophisticates passed the word along: this was *really* the cat's pajamas, and *with an all-star cast* . . .

Printed cheaply in pocket pamphlet form — it looked from the cover for all the world like an Aimee Semple McPherson evangelical tract — the hot little item that had all the Shieks and Shebas of 1927 buzzing in their rumbleseats was nothing other than a *complete, word for word, blow by blow transcription of "Lita Grey's BILL OF DIVORCEMENT from Charles Spencer Chaplin."* "Leaked" to the country's clandestine pornographic presses by Lita's lawyers at the moment the Petition for Divorce was filed, this deliberate maneuver to undermine Chaplin's name on a nationwide basis was eminently successful, and tens of thousands of copies were snapped up in the space of a few weeks by a mob ranging from teenagers to oldsters who battened on vicarious thrills in the Sex, Shock & Sensation departments . . .

The contents of this clandestine curiosa proved to be parsimonious slivers of raw pornography slid into the sententious meandering phraseology of undiluted "lawyer-ese." If you had patience to wade through the crap of dry-as-dust attorney-talk — and most people who had a chance to have a copy *did*, it seems — you would be rewarded with a skewerful of screwy screw-scenes and blunt little word-pictures of two years of conjugal peccadillos in the life of Charlie Chaplin.

Some of it took a little work to figure out even

by jaded jazz-babies, but soon flappers, flask-swigging frat men and the football team as well, were flipping through their big crossword-puzzle dictionaries to look up those necessarily naughty "furrin" words sprinkled like Spanish flies through the gobbledygook of legal gab, gab, gab . . .

Thumbing through the letter *F*, thousands of flaming youth learned a thing or two when they latched on to a Latin "whatsis" dotted quite often through the pages of *Complaint by Lita Grey:*

Fellatio, *n.*

As the spare mechanical definition provided for the Latin tid-bit sunk in to the Lost Generation of the Lawless Decade, they at least learned how to say it in a *dead tongue,* even if they didn't exactly learn anything new.

Returning to *Complaint by Lita Grey,* they filled in the blank spaces and discovered it was a question of a great deal of mouth-genital contact in the alleged sex life of Charles Spencer Chaplin — as related by his wife of two years.

This does not mean the slanted tract set out to prove that Charlie was a cocksucker on the sly. The Complaint contended, however, that Chaplin's notions of nuptial niceties were laced with a *liet-motif* that his legitimate spouse perform the act of *fellatio* (there's that Latin word popping up) on his tumescent organ of generation, with measurable frequency — whether it was a crime in the State of California or not.

While Lita fought to honor the laws of God and State at all times on the matrimonial mattress, clenching her pearly gates against the *"abnormal, against nature, perverted, degenerate and indecent act of fellatio,"* even her shell-like ears were under assault by the Devil's Advocate, Chaplin, with such blandishments as: *"Relax dear — all married people do it."*

To believe this one unenlightened wife's tale,

Lita indeed suffered much at the hands of that *"depraved, abnormal denatured pervert,"* Charles Chaplin. (Did not Louis Mayer shout some such epithet during the scuffle with Chaplin in the lobby of the Alexandria Hotel?)

According to Lita, from the time she became intimate with him at the age of sixteen years and two months, *"the Respondent never had marital relations with the Plaintiff in the manner that is usual between husband and wife."*

This astonishing intelligence leaves open to question what manner of miracle caused her to conceive the two babies she bore for the name of Chaplin — Sydney, the baby whose pre-marital conception forced the marriage in the first place, and Charlie Junior, born the following year. (Perhaps they were conceived "by ear" as a French joke goes.)

The two baby boys, Sydney and Charlie — whose conception would confuse even Dr. Spock — were nonetheless enthusiastically brandished by Lita during her divorce trial, almost like "People's Exhibit A" and "People's Exhibit B." Lita did not seem the least abashed to exhibit in public, to the lawyers, the judge, the photographers, those healthy bouncing products of some unspeakable genesiac monstrosity.

The grievances against Chaplin enumerated in the *Bill of Divorcement* (known as *Complaint of Lita* on the dirty book market) came under five principal headings:

1. *The Plaintiff was Seduced by the Respondent.*
2. The *Respondent-Seducer requested the Plaintiff to Submit to an Abortion when the Condition of Conception was Confirmed.*
3. *The Respondent did not consent to marry the Plaintiff Except After Being Constrained and Forced To Do So, and Then With the Reservation of the Intention of Divorce.*

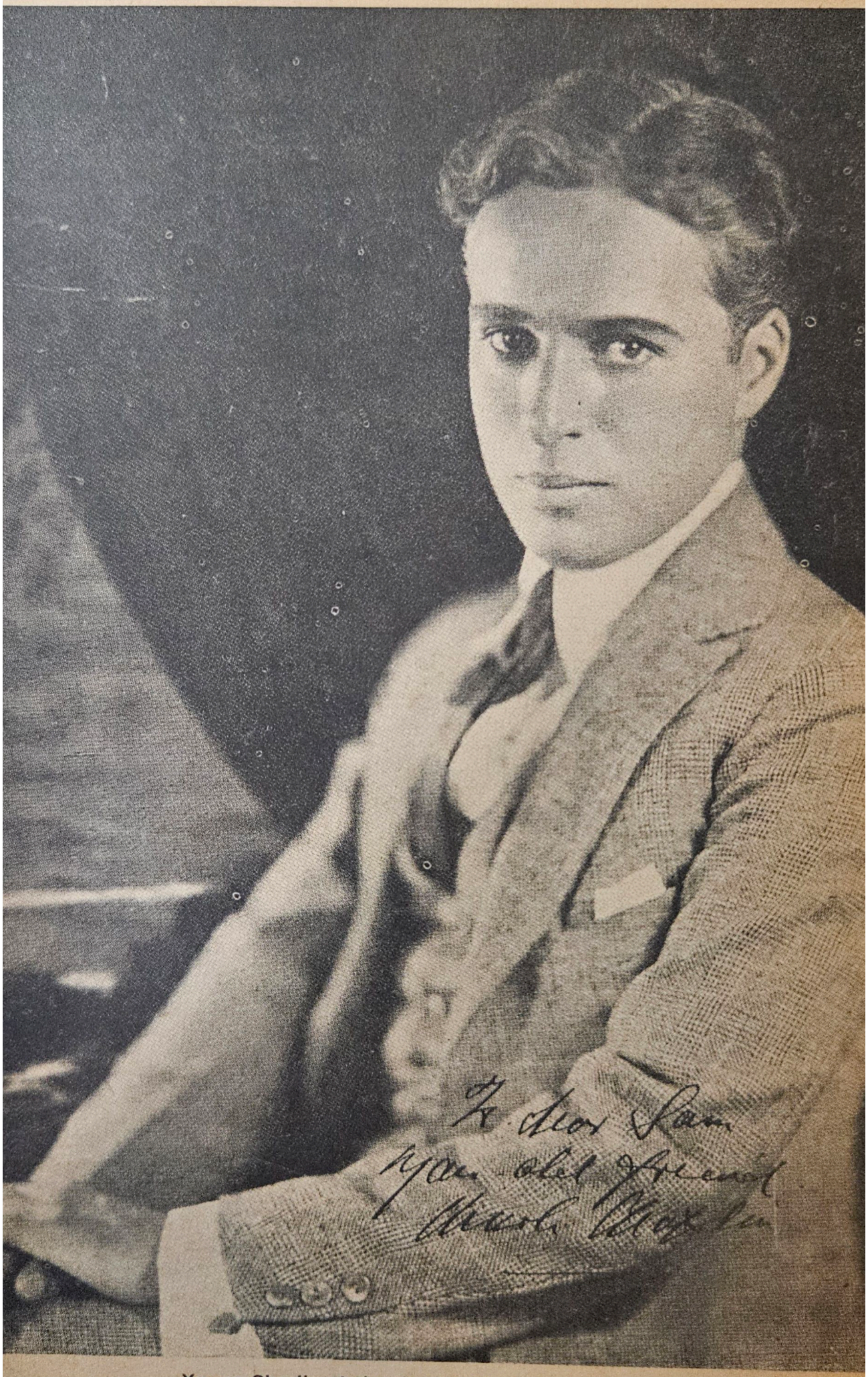
4. *To Precipitate the Divorce the Respondent Subjected the Plaintiff to a Calculated Plan of Cruel and Inhuman Treatment.*
5. *The Merits of these Claims is Proven by the Immorality of the Everyday Conversation of Charles Chaplin, by his Theories Concerning The Most Sacred Subjects, Which He Holds In Contempt.*

In illustration of the fifth charge, Lita cited several conversations in which Chaplain made light of such sacred cows as the institution of matrimony and the sex laws of the State of California. In his persistent effort to *"undermine and corrupt her moral impulses, to demoralize her rules of decency,"* Chaplin even went so far as to suggest she read books in which sexual matters were treated openly (such as *Lady Chatterley's Lover*).

A further effort at sexual enlightenment Lita found equally unacceptable: *"Whereas, four months before the separation of the Plaintiff and the Respondent, the Respondent suggested that a young girl who had the reputation of performing acts of sexual perversity spend the evening at their home, and the Respondent told the Plaintiff that they could have some fun together."*

All efforts to defrost his domestic iceberg proved equally futile — whether through literature or through the example of others, Lita turned them down with the same blue nose that puckered at the idea of "going down." It is hardly surprising that Chaplin was exasperated, and shouted at her, as she testified: *"Just you wait — I'll blow my top one of these days, and I'll kill you!"*

Chaplin *did* subsequently go temporarily off his rocker as a result of Lita, but it was in New York, after he had fled the hell his house had become. When he finally emerged from the nervous breakdown, after settling with Lita to the tune of *one*



Young Charlie at the time of his "shotgun marriage."

million dollars, he returned to Hollywood to resume work on *The Circus*, interrupted for one year by the litigation for divorce. He was a bachelor once more, but an embittered clown. He confided to one of his co-workers, "What I've been through has aged me ten years." He had ample justification.

Little Lolita had come a long way from that afternoon in a Hollywood tearoom. It was only natural she should split the blackmail bounty of her brief

Lita Grey Chaplin and two sons by Charlie.

matrimonial bout with her "financial manager" — who had briefed her since the tender age of seven in Chaplin knockout techniques — until the two kines had him on the mat for the million-buck countdown: her Mother.

The year of Chaplin's disastrous, headline-heavy Mexican marriage to Lita Grey — 1924 — Hollywood had another scorching scandal. Yet incredibly, *not one word* of the truth reached the public, and

the front pages of the country's papers bore not the slightest mention. For good cause.

That lord of the popular press, William Randolph Hearst, had something to do with the suppression. So powerful was he that not even rival tabloids would risk an open affront to the fearsome "W.R." Born with a fabulous silver-mine fortune in his mouth, his four - hundred - million - dollar fortune made "money talk" on a colossal scale. The fourth estate had heard tales of certain newsmen being "erased" from any further employment in the profession after displeasing Hearst — rumor had it that others had been "rubbed out." Even though word of the scandal had reached some of the country's most ruthless yellow sheets, for once the tabs decided to let a "natural" pass . . .

In the Twenties Hearst was knee-deep in a multimillionaire's version of a "vanity press" — in his case, it was a "vanity motion picture studio."

Hearst dropped untold millions in Cosmopolitan Productions, the film company he founded in a vainglorious, and totally vain effort to immortalize his youthful mistress, blonde, blue-eyed Marion Davies, who gave up the Ziegfeld Follies in 1917 when she was seventeen. She had climbed on his middle-aged lap at a backstage party and mussed his hair, calling him "Daddy" — Hearst took in her 120 pounds of charms and piped up in his startling factory-whistle falsetto: "You Ought To Be In Pictures." (Hearst's piping *castrato* tones were no reflection of his virility; he was born with an incurable deformation of the voice box. This Minnie-Mouse squeaker nixed his repeated bids for public office — his valiant attempts to deliver speeches invariably had the crowd cracking up.)

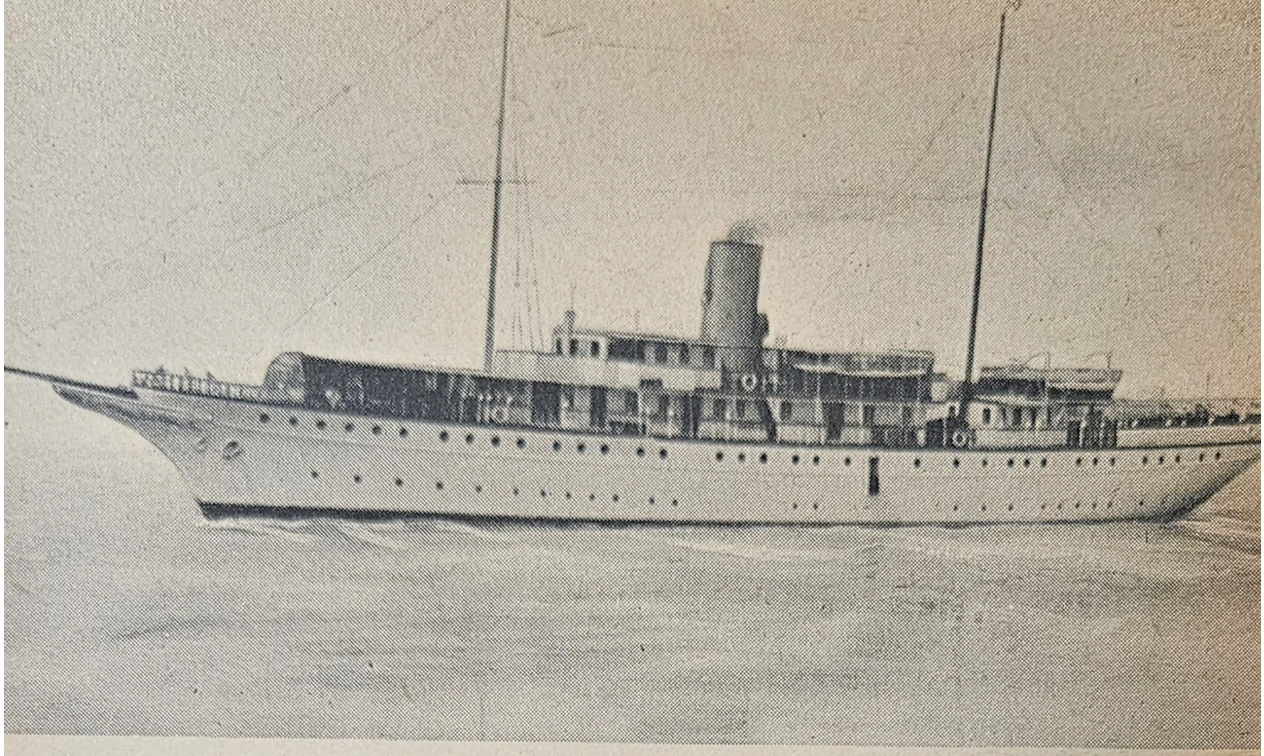
Pretty young showgirls were always hearing that line about "pictures" around that time, so it was a gag — but Marion was not so dumb, and knew that

her saucy rump was nuzzling a paunch worth plenty millions — she'd play it straight. Opening her china-blue orbs to saucer fullness, she blurted:

"D-d-d-delighted!"

Marion's incurable stutter did not deter Hearst from taking her on as mistress and movie star *de luxe*. Perhaps the similarity of their afflictions was a further cause for endearment on the part of "W. R." (When Hearst stubbornly persisted in pushing the Davies dud into sound films in the early Thirties, each Marion-mouthed syllable to reach the screen required countless retakes before the cameras; her hopelessly impedimented delivery made her dialog, word for word, the costliest in the history

Marion Davies called W. R. Hearst Sr. "D-d-daddy."



The ONEIDA was once a floating palace for the Kaiser.

of the cinema. No problem was posed, however, for her expensive appearances on the silent screen of the Twenties.)

Marion's D-d-daddy set up Cosmopolitan Productions in Hollywood to create her product; his papers and magazines regularly proclaimed her to be the greatest miracle the movies had ever seen; a huge Georgian barn on the beach at Santa Monica was conjured by Willie's wand to house his winsome hobby-ward. Soon Marion's "beach house" parties were the poshest events the film colony had ever seen — even in that age of giddy extravagance — the golden people grabbed at the chance for an invite to a Hearst-catered affair, and heartily approved of Marion cast as hostess even if they privately snickered at her attempts at histrionics on the screen.

To vary the pace of entertainments, Hearst had brought the *Oneida,* his two-hundred-and-eighty-foot cruiser, formerly a floating palace for the Kaiser, through the Panama Canal and kept it anchored within sight of Marion's "beach house" for further nautical diversion, should the cruising urge

occur to either of them. Invitations to these more intimate festivities on board the paper baron's barge were even more sought-after than the stupendous "beach house" affairs — the *Oneida* parties were so much more exclusive.

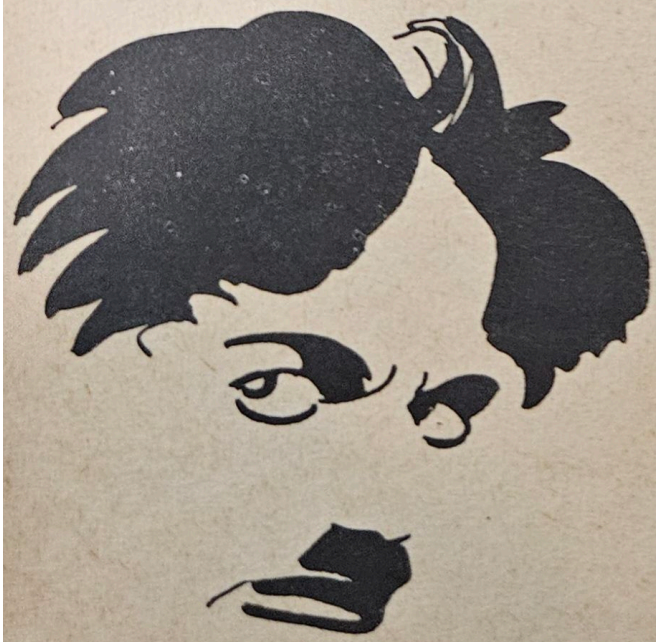
The cream of Hollywood's charmed circle received Hearst's invitation to another cruise of the *Oneida* scheduled for a mid-November weekend of 1924. Among the chosen were to be found the snob's delight, Elinor Glyn, British authoress of fashionably "daring" novels who had taken up profitable screenwriting; Dr. Daniel Carson Goodman, society physician to the stars; as well as top-ranking screen stars Charlie Chaplin, William Hart, Aileen Pringle, Seena Owen, and top-notch film producer-director, Thomas H. Ince, known as the "Wizard of the Western."

It is odd to note that Charlie Chaplin, whose "shotgun marriage" kept the Hollywood scandal-pots boiling for the papers in 1924, should play the role of a *deus ex machina* in the drama the fates decided to enact on board the *Oneida* as it plied the high seas.

Elinor Glyn arranged for Charlie to meet Marion Davies at dinner one evening earlier that year, when he was working on *The Gold Rush*. With Elinor as witty chaperone, the dinner at the Ambassador Hotel went swimmingly, and Hearst's absence from the state on business allowed Marion to indulge her natural *penchant* for flirt — once she had caught the twinkle in Chaplin's moon's-eyes. The vivacious blonde eclipsed the galling brunette millstone Charlie had back home, restored romance in his Lita-lacerated heart even if it was but an evening's illusion. Charlie was well aware that Marion was Hearst-class chattel.

With Hearst away the kids could play, and Marion had a chance to verify on her own, during some very intimate blanket parties on the Malibu beach

British authoress Elinor Glyn was among the chosen.



Charlie: Equine dimensions.

Peggy wasn't joshing.

Marion's blanket parties were observed by detectives.

at night, that Peggy Hopkins Joyce hadn't been joshing with her confidences on Charlie's Pan-like prowess — so wasted on his frigid spouse — as well as his equine dimensions. Concupiscent Charlie chased away the blah taste of Marion's multimillionaire, who — physically — was a sixtyish six-foot-four of flab, with, moreover, as often as not *une grosse bite molle*. Marion liked the millions, but liked a man who was really upstanding from time to time, if she could sneak him in to odd moments of her Hearstian agenda.

The blanket parties on the beach were soon brought to the omniscient Hearst's attention, however, as Willie had taken the delicate precaution of putting private eyes on Marion's tail during his absences from California.

In spite of the gloom at Malibu and the roar of the nearby surf, the dedicated dicks had spotted enough audio-visual ribaldry to make Hearst magenta with fury when the report was filed. Marion almost lost herself a millionaire *and* a movie career at that moment.

When the showdown came face-to-face with Hearst a short while later, Marion said he was *"l-like T-t-thunder!"* Her woman's wiles somehow managed to calm the storm.

Yet Hearst was ever suspicious and a double reason played in his brain when he deliberately included Chaplin among the invitations for the weekend cruise, in spite of his intelligence of his dalliance with his own mistress. He had given Marion a good spanking, like a naughty little girl; she had wheedled through her tears never again to stray; Hearst wanted to observe their reactions when thrown together — whether either one would betray a sign — the weekend at sea was perfect for his purposes.

Chaplin may have had some qualms about accepting the paper baron's invitation, but decided to put up a good show, and cruise with aplomb. He ac-

cepted without the presence of Mrs. Lita Chaplin.

With a cargo of filmland celebrities, a stock of vintage champagne, magnificent viands, a jazz-band, a vivacious Marion and an outwardly affable Hearst as munificent hostess and host, the *Oneida* took to the slightly choppy Pacific waters, under sunny California November skies. The route set by Hearst, the suspicious skipper, was a southern one,

W. R. Hearst (left) at one of his fabulous parties.

Marion

passing the island of Catalina, swinging down towards San Diego and Baja.

As inhibitions began going overboard the second day at sea, helped along by popping corks of *Cliquot 1908* and *Bathtub 1924*, it looked like a seafaring party would be in full steam by the night of November 19. Somewhere along the line in the evening's revels Hearst the host noticed that Charlie Chaplin had disappeared; a short time later it was Marion's turn to give him the slip.

However, it was not the horny, roving-eyed little Tramp, but the handsome, virile, one-time Broadway actor Thomas Ince, Hollywood's "Wizard of the Westerns," whom the pixie filmland Fates had cast in the principal role of the notorious yacht *Oneida* debacle.

Broad-minded as he was — in both senses of the word — Hearst, who was never much of a tippler himself, normally didn't like his parties to get *too* alcoholic. However on that memorable night, the morally cuckolded publishing king was interested only in keeping tabs on Marion and Charlie, who kept slipping out to the darkened deck.

Outraged and irate, Hearst neglected his other guests and didn't put his usual stopper on when he thought the booze had flowed enough. The result was that the *Oneida* revels degenerated, by all reports, into something like bank night in a distillery.

Hence it was a long time before any of the drunken seafarers noticed that Tom Ince wasn't feeling good; and longer before they realized he was seriously ill. Dr. Goodman diagnosed it as acute indigestion — a polite name for the familiar ravages of Prohibition grog — and when he got no better rapidly, the doctor ordered him taken ashore at San Diego and put on a train to Los Angeles.

The once-rugged Wizard of the Westerns was in such a bad way that he was taken off the train at Del Mar and given medical treatment at a hotel,

under a strict blanket of Hearstian secrecy. Then he was shipped on to Hollywood, where it was announced the next day that he had died in his own bed at home, of heart failure.

Inevitably the filmtown rumors flew. Hearst made the bad mistake of trying to hush up the whole affair, not relishing the public image of a lecherous millionaire who hosted drunken orgies abroad his yacht, where people died from drinking his bad booze. The Hays Office didn't like such goings-on.

The result was that the rumors kicked back on him: it was widely whispered that Hearst himself had killed Tom Ince when he caught the unfortunate Wizard in an intimate clinch with Marion Davies!

With some of the sharpest tongues in Hollywood on board for the fatal cruise, even Hearst's formidable power could not succeed in silencing them all. Rumors flew about the incident on board the ill-starred *Oneida*. Some suggested Ince had been shot, but did not specify by whom; others said he had drunk a poisoned cocktail that was in reality destined for Chaplin. But the fear that had silenced the nation's newspapers finally shut up, one by one, the open tattlers.

King Hearst, never one to be niggardly, especially when the little matter of hushing up a scandal was involved, did handsomely by some of the people who had been his guests on that bibulous cruise.

Louella Parsons in particular — a woman with a natural nose for news, who happened to be in the right spot at the right time, graciously accepted the baubles that began coming her way: a magnificent set of emeralds — earrings, heavy necklace, bracelets, all in the stone the color of envy — and shortly Louella grabbed off the prize she had been shooting for: a contract signed by WRH, guaranteeing her *lifelong* tenure as chief Hollywood movie columnist for the entire Hearst newspaper and magazine chain.

With all sorts of gossip linking him to the sudden and somewhat mysterious demise of Tom Ince, who had been a business associate of his, Hearst had the additional necessity of dealing with Nellie Ince, widow of the Wizard , who was making noises. He set up a fat trust fund for her, which lasted till the Depression wiped it off the slate. Destitute, in the darkest days of the Depression, Nellie tried making a go of it for a while as a lady taxi driver, then faded from public notice.

The basic *provocatreuse* of the celebrated *Oneida* incident, Marion Davies, crept chastened back into the Hearstian fold where oddly enough she was accepted. Her peccadillos from that date on would be confined mostly to hidden hip flasks, and gin bottles tucked away in toilet tanks, after Hearst tried to set certain limits on her intake. But she needed the booze, it is certain, to be able to take *him*.

As far as the *deus ex machina* of the *Oneida* deck drama was concerned: Charlie Chaplin — whose lech for Marion put Hearst in a gun-totin' humor in the first place — could thank what sparse lucky stars he had in 1924 for leading him below-decks with statuesque Aileen Pringle, instead of sampling some sea air on the poop deck with a plastered Davies.

Charlie's close call at Hearstian roulette dry-salted any further doting in Davies' direction, but he emerged from the cruise looking like a double-ganger — possessed by a singular affliction: *total amnesia* regarding the double-decker drama. Once dry land was reached, on the shore of San Diego, Charlie's weekend in retrospect was neither nautical nor naughty — it was nonexistent.

Chaplin's shrouded recollection was shared, moreover, by all souls on board — a blank was drawn by guests and galleyboys alike. They were about as "talkative" as Tom Ince himself.

Whether Ince was a corpse — or comatose — when brought to shore at San Diego, is open to question beneath the veil of secrecy surrounding the occasion. The sheeted stretcher was shunted aboard the Los Angeles-bound express train, where his body was cremated three days later. Hearst magnanimously underwrote the incineration of the inconvenient body. With the stigmatized stiff of the jaunty film genius reduced to a canister of ashes, Hearst had the situation "well in hand."

With the evidence in ashes, the newspapers' studied discretion on the demise of the great director (whose last movie was prophetically titled *Tragedy at Sea*), "W. R." still could not stifle the nasty rumors proliferating in the film colony, throughout California, and across the nation.

Despite the fact that the dead Wizard had been attended by three doctors and a nurse, the torrid rumors flew, and they persist to this day: that William Randolph Hearst shot and killed Thomas Ince when he found him trying to make Marion Davies — that the drunken circumstances of the *Oneida* revel had made Ince a luckless stand-in for Charlie Chaplin, for whom Hearst was really gunning.

Some of the rumors had it right down to the fine details: Hearst wielding a diamond-studded pistol, while Lolly Parsons lurked unseen in the shadows of a rowboat.

William R. Hearst Sr.

Finally, several weeks following Ince's furtive funeral and instant incineration, the District Attorney of San Diego, C. C. Kempley, felt compelled to conduct an investigation of the doubtful death. Kempley's "probe" was made public early in 1925, and merely echoed the cursory, earlier obituary:

"I began this investigation because of the many rumors brought to my office regarding the case. I am satisfied that the death of Mr. Ince was caused by heart failure as a result of acute indigestion. If there is any investigation of the stories of liquor drinking on board the yacht where Mr. Ince was a guest, it will have to be in Los Angeles, where, presumably, the liquor was secured."

That is as far as the investigation went — *Hearst oblige* — thanks to political pressures brought to bear from all sides.

The Hearst-Davies diarchy rode out the scandal unscathed, but as D. W. Griffith remarked in later years:

"All you have to do to make Hearst turn white as a ghost is mention Ince's name. There's plenty wrong there, but Hearst is too big for anybody to touch."

It was soon known through the film colony that not only the mention of Ince's name within Hearst's hearing would nix future invitations to the Santa Monica "beach house" or the fabulous San Simeon "ranch", but equally taboo was the very mention of death.

And there *l'Affaire Ince* remains today, still shrouded in a measure of mystery, and subject to speculation.

As an aftermath to the scandal which tragically terminated the brilliant film career of Thomas Ince, the film colony learned of a scandalous indulgence on the part of the late director in which a number of leading celebrities had been unsuspecting victims.

Marion couldn't keep the affairs secret from Hearst.

Marion Davies and W. R. Hearst Sr.: He always took her back.

With the fortune accumulated by his multiple and extremely popular productions, Ince had undertaken the construction of an elaborate, enormous mansion, a "showplace" where the golden people delighted to spend frolicsome weekends, with luxurious guest rooms available for all comers.

What the charmed circle ignored, however, was the sly feature incorporated in the rambling castle which the host himself designed: a secret gallery above the guest rooms provided with cleverly concealed peep-holes, revealing a fine view of each of the beds. *Some of Hollywood's most famous couples had thus repaid their host's bounty by a gracious*

demonstration of their boudoir techniques . . . Only Ince had the key to the concealed peep-show passageway, but the architectural innovation became known to the film colony when the mansion was put up for sale after his death.

Griffith was the only film figure who shared Ince's domiciliary secret during his lifetime, and as an "in joke" incorporated peep-holes, sliding panels and secret passageways in his "thriller," *One Exciting Night*. His film was a spoof on movie mysteries, however, without the spicy nocturnal spectacles that must have made many a weekend at "Ince's Castle" memorable occasions indeed . . .

"D-d-daddy" decreed the best in dressing rooms for baby.

Rudolph Valentino and one movie vamp, Vilma Banky.

While the rumors about the strange death of Thomas Ince ricocheted throughout America during 1925, in the film colony itself the incident was reduced to little more than a sardonic joke, with the cruiser *Oneida* being referred to as "William Randolph's Hearse."

The next flood of scandalous rumors to hit Hollywood had a similar mortuary overtone. The occasion was the death of the screen's "Great Lover," Rudolph Valentino, on August 23, 1926, at ten minutes after noon, in New York's Polyclinic Hospital.

The official cause of death was stated to be peritonitis, following an operation for an inflamed appendix, but rumor attributed his death to an "arsenic revenge" by a well-known New York society woman — whom he dropped after a brief affair—while in the city on a personal-appearance tour to promote his last film, *The Son of the Sheik.* Other rumors affirmed Rudy had been shot by an irate cuckolded husband, or that the star was syphilitic and died when the disease struck the brain.

During the last years of his life, the dreamboat of millions of America's jazz-babies and jazz-mamas had been the butt of a number of unkind attacks in the nation's newspapers, ranging from sneers at his testimonials for Valvoline Face Cream, to remarks that cast a doubt on his virility.

The unkindest cut of all came from an editorial writer for the *Chicago Tribune,* who chose the moment of Rudy's personal-appearance in the City of Capone, during the summer of 1926, to promote *The Son of the Sheik,* to issue a front page blast.

The editorial was called PINK POWDER PUFF, and gouged Valentino in no uncertain terms:

"When will we be rid of all these effeminate youths, pomaded, powdered, bejeweled and bedizened, in the image of Rudy—that painted pansy?

An astonishing dance-hall, The Sheik, *with an exclusively masculine clientele, has recently opened in Chicago: in the "men's lounge" filled with swishing sissies are to be found-beneath a portrait of Rudy—an array of cosmetics, pomades, lipstick and mascara, including an automatic dispenser for pink talcum powder. It only takes a dime in the apparatus to receive a jet of perfumed powder on cheeks that would be better off slapped. That's what we've come to in 1926. Without any doubt, for all these refinements, we can thank "men" like Valentino, that pink powder puff, who never goes out without his vanity case. Ah! It would have been better if the beautiful gardener's boy, Mr. Gugliemi, alias Valentino, had been drowned in a swamp before being imported to the United States, and the younger generation of American males replaced razors with depilatories and the ancient caveman virtues of their forefathers were replaced by cosmetics, flopping pants, and slave bracelets."*

Rudy hardly thought it fair he should be blamed for the mannerisms of a youthful coterie of Clark Street faggots, and furiously challenged the *Chicago Tribune* hatchet -man to a duel or even a fist fight. This and similar attacks found their origin in Valentino's well-known taste for sartorial extravagance, his famous slave bracelet without which he was never seen in public, his gold jewelry and preference for heavy perfumes; his chinchilla-lined coats and pronounced coquetry.

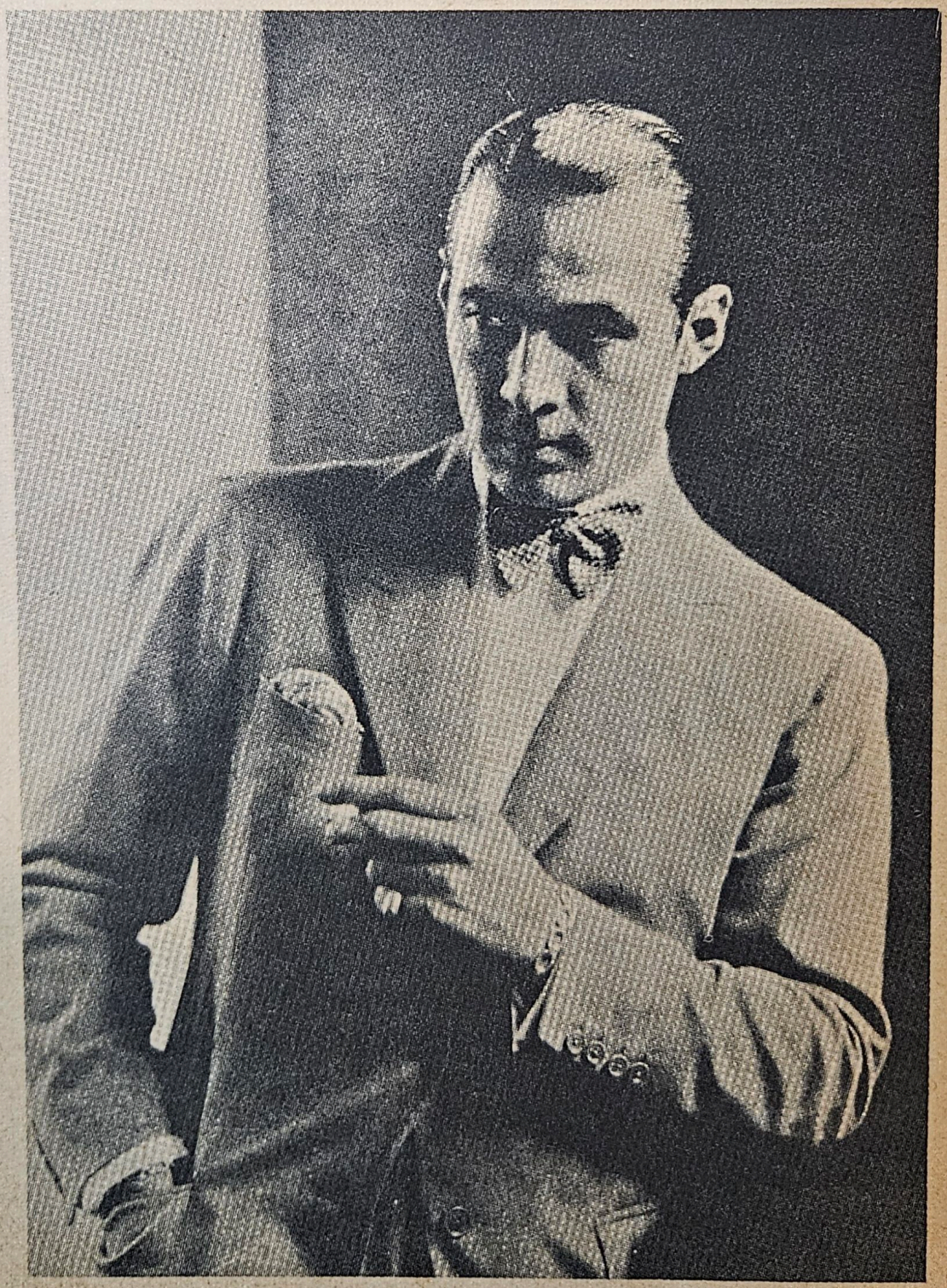
To further confound the question of Valentino's virility, was the fact that the two women who he had married were *both notorious Lesbians.*

When Natacha Rambova, Valentino's wife (whose "slave bracelet" he wore at all times) divorced him in 1926, the revelation that the marriage has been *"non-consumated"* somewhat rumpled the Great Lover's reputation.

A similar charge has been advanced during the

divorce proceedings from his first wife, Jean Acker, in 1922, who accused him not only of slighting her in the sex department but of slugging her during a quarrel as well.

Rudy married his *second* Lesbian before his divorce decree from his *first* Lesbian was final, and this technical oversight between these two curious "marriages of convenience" led to his arrest for bigamy.



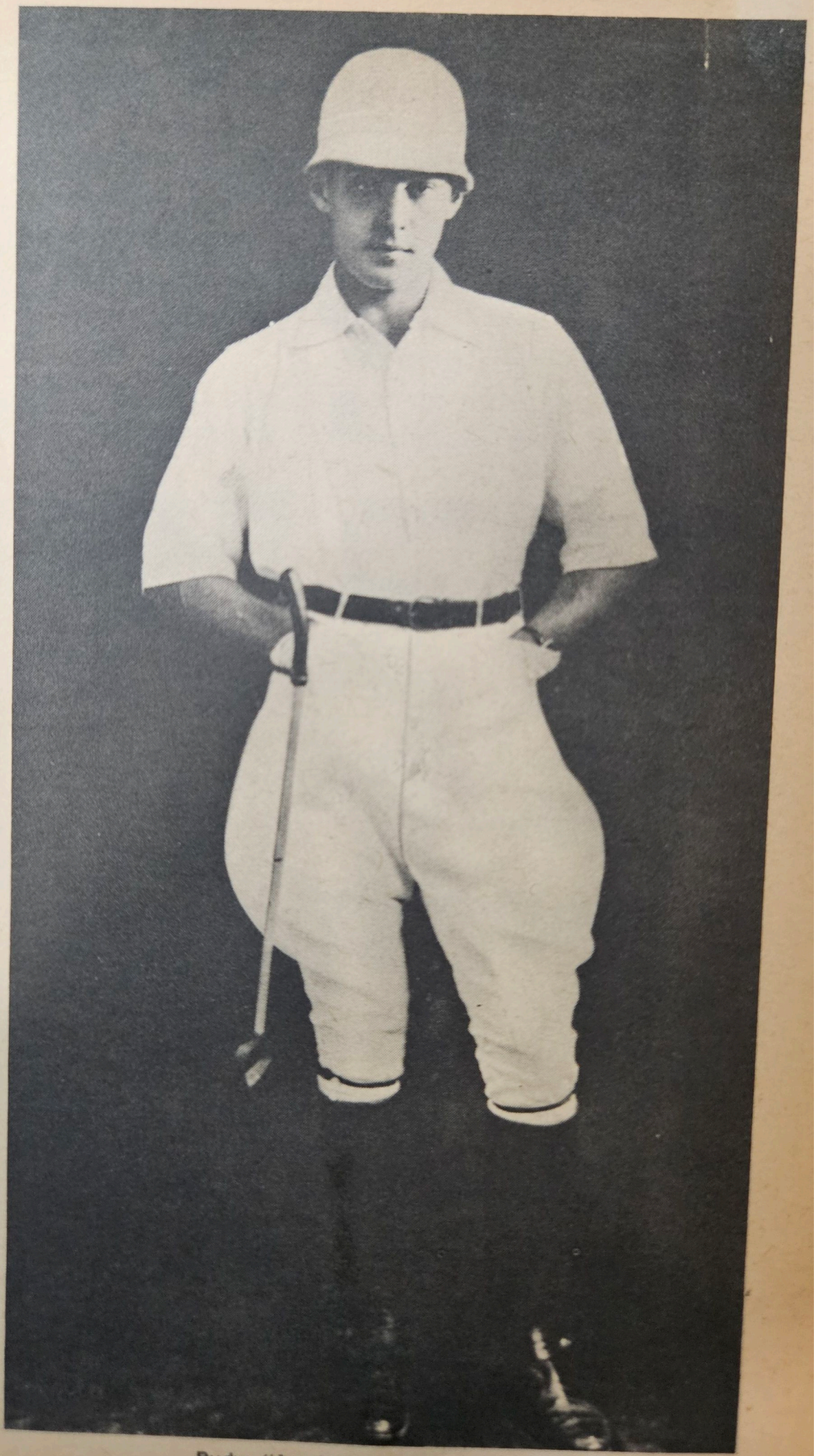
Valentino's last photograph, taken on August 6, 1926.

Both Jean Acker and Natacha Rambova were "protegees" of the exotic Alla Nazimova—Hollywood's most distinguished feminine import at that time—whose off-beat parties at her famous estate, the Garden of Allah on Sunset Boulevard, caused considerable comment in the film colony. It was Natacha who designed the costumes for Alla's own production of *Salome*, in which Nazimova starred herself, employed only homosexual actors as "homage" to Oscar Wilde—and wiped out her life savings. Nazimova introduced Rudy to *both* his wives, and was believed in Hollywood to have "stage-managed" both marriages—rather sloppily, to judge by the results.

While Valentino may have been maneuvered into matrimony with an assist from Alla, there is no doubt he sought women stronger than himself and readily took a shine to "butch" ladies. Valentino called Natcha "The Boss," and she lived up to it so well—by constantly high-handing her husband's work at Paramount—that the studio resorted to a contract with a clause barring her from the set. This resulted in her command for Rudy to leave Paramount. She then wrote two screenplays for Valentino, *The Hooded Falcon* and *What Price Beauty?*—both of which proved "unproduceable" after a considerable investment of time and money. Their one collaboration that saw the light of day was a slim volume of verse entitled *Daydreams*, whose closing lines are:

Alas
At times
I find
Exquisite bitterness
In
Your kiss.

Whatever his private accommodations with his tough brides may have been, the public slurs on his manhood caused him such bitterness that even as



Rudy: "Am I a pink powder puff?"

he lay dying, fighting stoicly against terrible pain, he asked the friends at his bedside: *"And now, do I act like a pink powder puff?"*

At the news of Valentino's death, two women attempted suicide in front of Polyclinic Hospital; in London, a girl took poison before Rudy's inscribed photograph; an elevator-boy of a luxury hotel in Paris was found dead on a bed covered with Valentino's photographs.

New York was the scene of a ghoulish carnival as a mob of over one hundred thousand people

Valentino lying in state at a New York funeral home.

fought to enter the Frank E. Campbell Funeral Church, Inc. for a two-second glimpse of the Great Lover "lying in state" on a catafalque in the garish Gold Room. The body was flanked by phony Fascist Black Shirt guards at attention, with an equally phony wreath labeled "From Benito" nearby—a press-agent stunt by Campbell's whose cosmeticians *really* made Rudy resemble a "pink powder puff."

Among those who *did* win admittance to the candle-lit bier were the first of Valentino's marital non-consummations, Jean Acker—whose display of grief at coffin's edge might have been tempered had she known that Rudy singled her out in his will for the munificence of *one lousy buck*—and Pola Negri, who upstaged everybody by rushing in from Hollywood decked out in mourning weeds tagged at three thousand dollars, then by sobbing buckets and fainting before the coffin—and the photographers.

FINAL EDITION

DAILY NEWS

NEW YORK'S PICTURE NEWSPAPER

THE LARGEST CIRCULATION IN AMERICA

RUDOLPH VALENTINO DEAD

His death was headline news across the nation.

Between sobs, Pola claimed she had promised her hand to Rudy—another claim was immediately filed in the tabloids by Ziegfeld Girl Marion Kay Brenda, who stated Valentino had proposed to *her* in Texas Guinan's night-club the evening before he was stricken.

As Rudy's body was shipped West for entombment in the Court of the Apostles of Hollywood Memorial Park, a commemorative song was crooned by Rudy Vallee over the nation's super-

heterodyne radios: *There's a New Star in Heaven Tonight—R-u-d-y Va-a-alentino.* Rudy's last interview in *Vanity Fair* quoted him as being fed up with "great lover" roles and aspiring to portray Cesare Borgia on the screen; many persisted in believing he died like a victim of the Borgias.

Valentino's death at thirty-one left inconsolable a consort of paramours of *both* sexes, to judge by the number of tear-streaked testimonials. Aside from the "Ladies in Black" bearing flowers annually to the mausoleum on the anniversary of his death, votive lights flicker on "Valentino Altars" in the abodes of aging gentlemen of artistic bent in Paris and Rome, as well as Hollywood, even to this day.

One of the latter, a blue-haired seigneur who has long laid aside his ballet slippers, keeps a few of Rudy's pubic hairs enshrined on a crystal reliquary in his musty bedroom, along with another Valentino relics, and mystically recalls a blowjob he once gave Rudy as *"Direst Communion with the Godhead . . . ."*

The eternally mourning auntie-mystagogue, who berated the memory of Rudy's manager for being so "greedy" with his celebrated charge, is one of the last living links in a cult once counted by the millions, who worshipped—a shade less intimately—the sexy *ragazzo* from the heel of Italy, who rose to the heights in Hollywood, as *Living God.*

Another perennial source of scandalous rumor in Hollywood during the Twenties revolved on the question of what *really went on* during the shooting of the notorious "orgy scenes" that were invariably included in the films of that stormy individualist, Erich von Stroheim.

There was ample room for speculation as the deluxe bordello sequences directed by Stroheim for *Merry-Go-Round, The Merry Widow, The Wedding March,* and the unfinished *Queen Kelly,* were

all closely guarded conclaves, on stages where even the studio chiefs were "off limits."

It is no wonder these sessions were considered to be veritable gang-bangs. It was known that shooting sometimes continued for twenty hours without interruption on the locked stages; that Stroheim "treated" the participants to choice goodies such as squab and caviar and served real champagne in spite of Prohibition; that the hand-picked extras—exotic women and aristocratic types many of whom were genuine *emigres*—often emerged having the air of having spent a weekend in Sodom, bleary-eyed and staggering; some girls bearing evidence of whip-marks or bites and teetering on the edge of hysterics.

For the general wear-and-tear involved and the hours of overtime Stroheim saw to it these extras were handsomely rewarded; in return they respected their director's law of silence once off the closed set.

Stroheim often consecrated weeks of work and considerable chunks of capital of Universal, Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer, Paramount, United Artists, as well as the personal fortune of Gloria Swanson and that of Joseph Kennedy, filming wild scenes of *Alt Wien* excesses *that no censor in the world would pass,* let alone Will Hays with his prim "Purity Code" of *Do's and Don'ts!*

Since only a few cronies of Stroheim ever saw the complete "rushes" of this festive footage, aside from the horrified studio bosses who hacked these scenes to shreds to comply with "Big-Scissors-Man" Hays—who would then make *his* additional cuts so that only a few teasing, tantalizing flashes remained in the released film—imagination ran riot as to their content.

It was believed that the "show" being watched with such avidity through a row of peep-holes in *The Wedding March* really *was* worth sitting up

and taking notice.

It was known that for just one scene in this same film Stroheim imported a Viennese professional female sadist, of the Wanda school, skilled in the application of the "spider."

The luxurious lupanar of *The Wedding March* had "hostesses" of all nations — Chinese, Spanish, Japanese, Jewish, Turkish, French — each with her erotic specialty; depilated fairies in white wigs and white body make-up playing stringed instruments, blindfolded to prevent recognition of the "nobs" present; male and female Negro "slaves" whose metal *pseudo*-chastity-belts were closed with heart-shaped padlocks; there was even a refinement due perhaps more to Stroheim's imagination than Austria-Hungary's decadence—*a pretty pair of accommodating Siamese Twins!*

Even if Stroheim's orgiastic extras for the most part kept their mouths shut, there were certain "leaks" that made the rounds of the studios. There were bizarre anecdotes about a canine performer in *The Merry Widow*, whose appearances in the film from time to time were supposed to be a running-gag, but whose entire footage ended up on the cutting-room floor. Stroheim kept hundreds of elaborately-costumed extras waiting for days, not to mention stars Roy D'Arcy, John Gilbert, and Mae Murray, in the huge ballroom scene, waiting for the dog to enregister a sneeze—a feat his trainer insisted the animal was trained to perform on command. The same hound proved equally amateurish during a closed-set "orgy" scene, where Stroheim's script had him mounting the plump thigh of a bejeweled Fraulein passed-out on a bearskin.

(It is suspected Stroheim was burning up M-G-M money with malice aforethought on such unshowable scenes, in partial revenge for the barbarous destruction of the original negative of his lengthly

masterpiece, *Greed*, by his mortal enemy, Irving Thalberg, production chief at the Culver City studio, and its new boss, "Iron-Monger" Mayer.)

Thalberg earned Stroheim's emnity in 1923, when the former was production manager at Universal, and took the direction of *Merry-Go-Round* away from "Von" after he had indulged in a series

Eric von Stroheim: There were leaks from the orgiastic rituals.

of extravagances for the picture such as ordering silk underdrawers with the monogram of the Imperial Guard for the Guardsmen in his picture. (While the expenditure for invisible drawers *seemed* unjustifiable, Stroheim *did* intend to feature them in a military brothel scene, involving stripping and bedding-down, he never got the chance to film.)

The **Merry Widow** was a box office smash, but . . .

In spite of the fact that *The Merry Widow* was a subsequent box-office smash, even with very little of "Madam Rosa's Brothel" left on the screen, the stubborn scruples of Stroheim were not made to please the likes of Mayer and Thalberg, who set out to "get" him from 1925 on, spreading the word around Hollywood that he was an untrustworthy wastrel, "uncommercial," and a sex-maniac in his private life besides. The legend of his extravagance, which began as a publicity campaign at Universal when his name had been written "$troheim" during the shooting of *Foolish Wives,* now boomeranged and he found it increasingly arduous to find backers. The front-office men echoed from studio to studio that "working with Stroheim was like shoveling dollars down a well."

The Saga of Stroheim in Hollywood—truly the battle of a giant against pygmies—was doomed to

end badly. The narrow little minds of the front-office men got the better of the ferocious visionary.

After his disenchanted return to Europe, Erich von Stroheim declared: *"Hollywood killed me."* That was the least Hollywood could do for the most disconcerting genius ever to challenge its cardboard dogmas.

Some years after Stroheim had pulled out of Hollywood, word got around of the existence of a compendium of the famous "orgy scenes"—supposedly all destroyed—that a cutting-room assistant had managed to spirit away from the studio archives where they were marked for the "melting-pot."

The cutter—who was something of a "bug" on the subject of so-called blue films, worked diligently on the Stroheim footage and eventually came up with a quite coherent feature-length dilly, which he proudly titled *One Delirious Night.*

On special occasions he would invite his technician friends to see this synthetic epic, and since they were all employed at M-G-M, took delight in adding some short subjects which were examples of the more exotic talents of some budding young starlets. One reel in particular, it was whispered, showed the torrid antics of one of M-G-M's then top stars, filmed in her younger and eagerer days.

These silent stag classics bore such evocative titles as *Velvet Lips, Serving the Navy, Mad Caresses, Free-For-All Orgy* and *Loose-Living Lady* — true collector's items, since the actress was reported to have spent one hundred thousand dollars buying up copies and burning them, since she had become a star. But copying dirty movies is as current as copying dirty photos, so she could never be *really* sure her sexy tracks on celluloid were covered, any more than Richard Barthelmess could be certain he'd seen the last of those souvenir photos taken with the football team one rather loose weekend in Hartford, Connecticut, during his

days at Trinity College.

In the midst of these goings-on, a fire of mysterious origin swept the hillside abode of the enterprising film-cutter, the amateur of celluloid erotica. In the nitrate explosion that ensued, not only the sexy stag reels went up in smoke, but also the last traces of the famous "orgy scenes" of von Stroheim. For good measure, the sleeping cutter-collector was burned to a crisp as well. Arson was of course suspected, but the torch artist was never traced.

If it may be assumed that Stroheim's baroque bordello extravaganzas are lost for all time, it seems that was not the fate of quite *all* of the joyous stag reels — which one of the alleged participants has euphemistically referred to as "dance-films." Some scratchy copies are still reported to be going the rounds on the fraternity and smoker circuits; *Velvet Lips* was a favorite of the late Farouk and is now in the collection of an oil-rich prince of Saudi-Arabia. And curiously, some of the prize items have found strange but secure shelter in the State Film Archives of Prague, since the regime "nationalized" the private film collection of a munitions king, and decided the sociological study of such erotic pearls merited their preservation for posterity.

The name of Joan Crawford, then in her heyday in the top galaxy of M-G-M, was whispered in connection with some of these stag reels. It was said she had made them when she was a Shubert showgirl under her real name of Lucille LeSueur. In her autobiography *A Portrait of Joan* (Paperback Library, Inc., N.Y., 1964), the Pepsi-Cola board queen, reminiscing about her wedding to Franchot Tone in 1935, has this to say:

"There was only one discordant note. On our wedding night I received an anonymous phone call. I'd received such calls before and had been afraid to tell anyone. Two men said they had in their possession a stag reel in which I danced. They wanted to sell it to me.

Joan Crawford: Threats of blackmail.

"I had made no such movie; I suggested they contact Mr. Mayer in Hollywood or M-G-M's legal wizard, J. Robert Rubin in New York. Mr. Rubin viewed the film and assured the men that: 'If that's Joan Crawford, I'm Greta Garbo.' The threats of blackmail which had followed me for so long, ended the minute Mr. Rubin saw that film."

Whether the power behind the press happened to be Hearst, with his New York tabloid, the *Mirror*, Bernarr Macfadden and his no-holds barred *Graphic*, or just some small town editor trying to make a go of it, they all knew Hollywood headlines sold newspapers — *if* they were spicy, shocking, or downright scandalous. For all Hays might whine on in his flat, Midwestern voice, in appeals for the papers to report film colony news "fairly," the press devoted much more space to Hollywood's fourteen top-name divorces and three separations for the year 1926 — for instance — than it did to the twenty-three stellar marriages of that same year.

Canon Chase, one of the Twenties' more dismal and aggressive professional bluenoses and "reformers," was overjoyed when word leaked out in 1926 that Hays had received "payola" from the Teapot Dome boys during his membership in Harding's Cabinet, and was shown up as something less than lily-white-pure; Chase lashed out in the press at Hays *and* Hollywood, claiming the town was just as indecent as ever and implying that *he* could do a much nippier job in the cleanup department.

Hays maintained a dignified silence under this frontal assault, busying himself instead by seeing to it that the nation's church organizations received notice of Hollywood's pious intentions in the forthcoming sermon on celluloid: Cecil B. DeMille's *The King of Kings*, and that the actor who played the Christus — who was reputed to be something of a queen — neither drank, smoked nor swore.

In spite of these pietistic hand-outs the popular press continued to be "unfair" to Hollywood as all get-out during the latter years of the Twenties. The groundwork had been laid with the boggling Arbuckle-Taylor-Reid scandals, topped by the salacious stories "leaked" out to the nation during Chaplin's divorce from Lita Grey.

If the tabloids needed something "grabbing" for a weekend edition — if the Hall-Mills or Snyder-Gray mayhem was running thin, or if Daddy Browning and Peaches were beginning to pall — there was always an "expose" of some new vice or peril to America's girlhood in that capital of sin, Hollywood. There were always some disillusioned "Beauty Queens" around who hadn't *made it* into the golden circle, willing to tell the world how they were "ruined" by the movie minions — for front-page pictures and a price.

The "image" was also helped along by a star, such as Mae Murray, who sold her "memoirs" to be serialized in Hearst's Sunday Supplement *The American Weekly,* with one installment titled *The Dirtiest Hun in Hollywood* — embroidering on her run-in with Stroheim during the making of *The Merry Widow.*

The Sunday reading public was edified to learn that Stroheim was such a sadistic monster that poor Mae was driven to shout at him, *"You dirty Hun!"* and stalk off the set. When La Murray then reported that the studio boss, Louis B. Mayer, bopped Stroheim on the kisser, the readers were led to assume this had something to do with righting Mae's miffed dignity — the actual fact was that Stroheim had let drop within Mayer's hearing that in his opinion, *"all women were whores."* (Mayer did indeed let fly a haymaker, screaming "No one can talk about women like that in *my* presence and get away with it!")

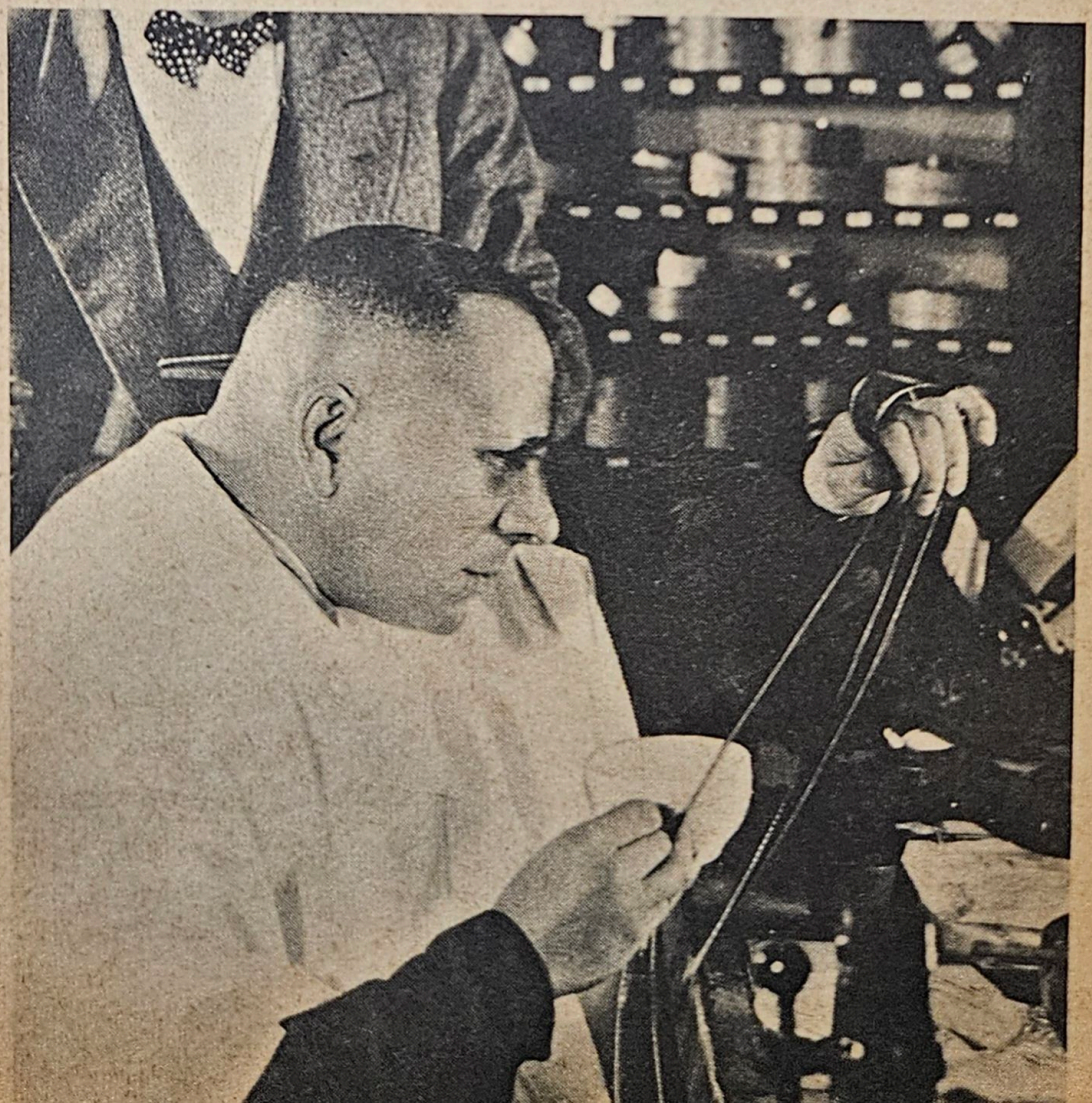
All through the Twenties the tabloids dutifully trotted out the Hollywood "Filth Parade," drooling over "Wild Parties," "Orgies of the Stars," or "Starlet Warns of Road to Ruin," and the sex-mad, sensation-thirsty public lapped it up and asked for more.

The public's "needs" for titillation on the subject of Hollywood's stars were also served by a

new, copyrighted, breed exporting trivia and innuendo: the gossip columnist. The drivel queen of them all was of course Louella *"Oneida"* Parsons, throwing her weight around since Hearst "set her up" as his chief Hollywood correspondent. Louella's column told the nation *who* in Hollywood was shacking up with *whom* (through the transparent euphemism "going out" together), who was *in* and who was *out* — the latter either by pointed avoidance of mention or a scathing attack, if she, Hearst, or Davies felt moved to vengeance.

While Louella and the other tattlers kept score on "who's fucking who" in filmdom with a code even a "Dumb Dora" could catch on to, the tabs proffered gamier meat: to believe them, there was was no wickeder place on earth than Hollywood — a resurrected Babylon, with Sodom and Gomorrah for suburbs. They pictured the stars as splendid,

What really went on behind the doors of Stroheim's locked sets?



soulless women wandering from orgy to orgy on the arms of glitteringly cynical males of a tragic beauty, in a world haunted by the specters of Drug, Suicide, and Murder. And, out in the accursed suburbs, ways of sinning took place that were certainly stranger, it was hinted, than adultery.

It must be admitted that from the time it became known as the world's film capital, shady characters descended on Hollywood like a swarm of night-moths to a searchlight; two-bit gangsters, bootleggers and dope pushers, swindlers, blackmailers and petty extortionists, all manner of sex-freaks, stock speculators, crank cultists, astrologists, mediums, phony "healers," fortune-tellers, even "psychologists" (already!) fluttered frantically about the edges of the charmed circle. Not to overlook all the thousands of young girls lured by the promises of phony talent schools — a Hollywood Gold Rush that panned out almost always nothing but bitter dross, a fool's-gold of delusion, so that many took to whoring in desperation, unable to find work even as usherettes, shop-girls or waitresses.

These streetwalkers called themselves "movie extras" to avoid the California vagrancy laws, so that when they were raked in by the cops — or raided in cheap hotels — the papers could escalate the incident into headlines reading: "Beautiful Film Stars Nabbed in House of Ill Fame." The reporters would then describe a luscious brunette, stunning blonde or knock-out readhead whose "names were being withheld" — allowing the readers to imagine them as Dolores Del Rio, Alice White and Hollywood's hottest readhead, Clara Bow.

It must be added that Clara Bow — known since 1926 as the "Hottest Jazz Baby in Films" — soon had her own headlines across the country's front pages, for very definite reasons.

The tabloids headlined: CLARA'S "LOVE BALM" ROMANCE, and the avid readers learned that the prolonged therapy Clara had been receiving from Hollywood's dashing, popular society physician, Dr. William Earl Pearson — for "nerves" and "insomnia" — consisted in the repeated application of Dr. Pearson's person on the prostrate Bow. As the "love balm" was rubbed in on a nightly basis Pearson's wife put a private eye on her husband's tail, the trail invariably ending at Clara's Spanish hacienda.

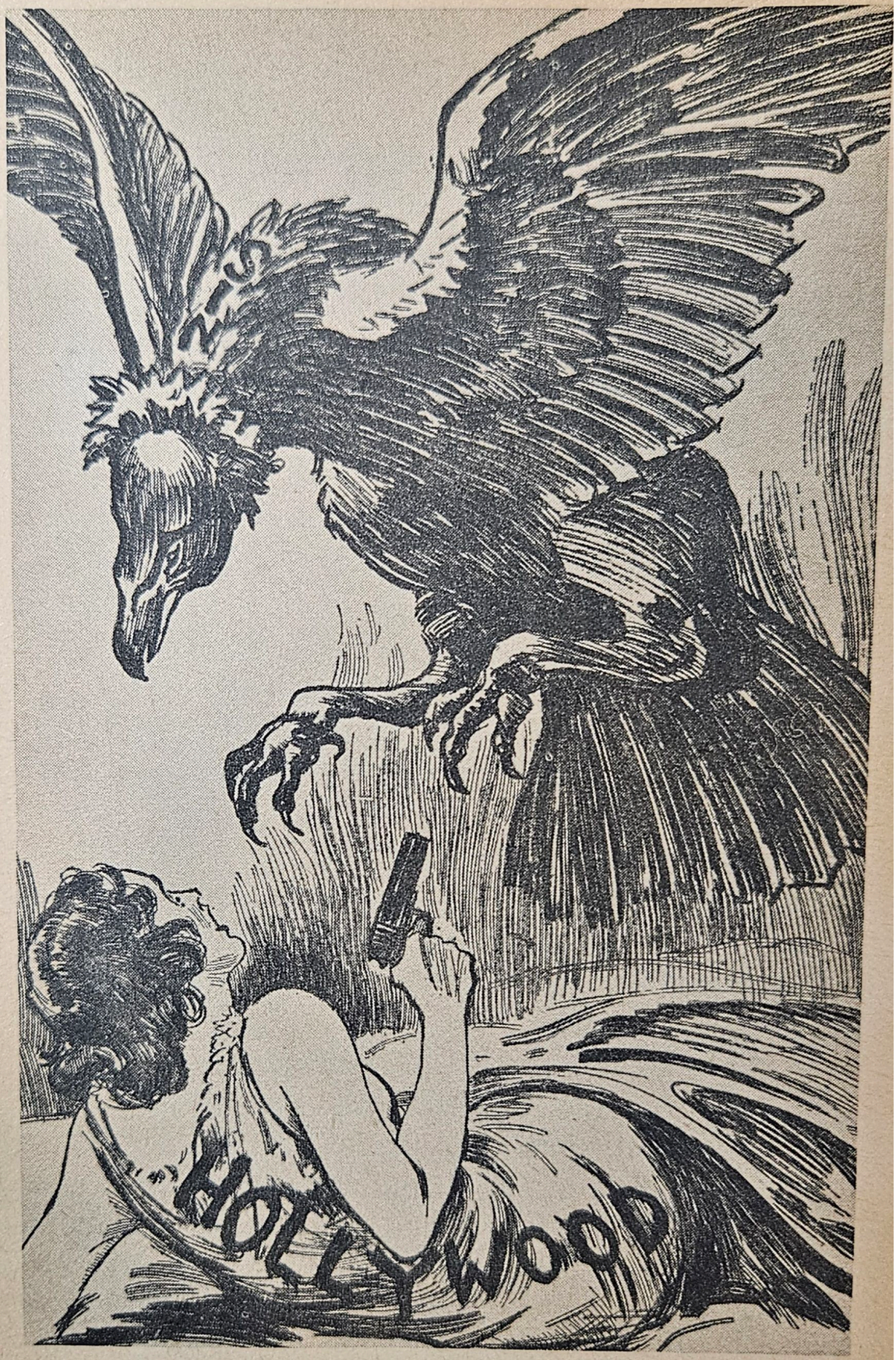
Clara was soon deprived of her diligent doctor and lost some sleep as Mrs. Pearson named her as co-respondent in the divorce petition she filed against her husband, suing *La* Bow for "alienation of affections." The papers squeezed every drop of juice out of the "love balm" scandal featuring Hollywood's hottest-pantsed jazz-baby, and Clara Bow was squeezed for thirty thousand dollars by the doctor's neglected spouse.

Clara's hottest scandal, however, did not erupt until 1930 — but its revelations covered the four years that Clara was a top star in Hollywood — beginning in 1926.

In 1930 Clara Bow's private secretary, Daisy DeVoe, a blonde, bright-faced girl Clara's own age, sold *all* the ins-and-outs of the It Girl's love life during four fast-living, faster-fucking years to the highest paying tabloid — in vengeance for a frusted attempt at blackmail.

Miss DeVoe proved particularly "devoted" as a private secretary, as she noted the hours of arrival and departure of each male visitor to Clara Bow's boudoir, and the names read like a roll-call of Hollywood's top-drawer talent; aside from Dr.

Clara Bow was the hottest jazz baby in films.



Pearson, there were a number of rugged leading men, ranging from comics to cowboy stars — including the late Rex Bell, whom Clara later married. Gary Cooper, then a rising young hopeful, was on the list. Even the famous "heavy," Bela Lugosi, who was just reaching renown in his *Dracula* role,

Gary Cooper's name was on list recorded by Clara Bow's secretary.

got into the act.

Poor Clara — the list was just a little *too* long, particularly when it was added that Clara would often take on the *entire* "Thundering Herd" — the famed University of Southern California football team — in brawling, gangbanging, beery weekend parties. right down to the last man.

The Golden Circle decided Clara had gone a little beyond bounds, as all these allegations — unsupported and denied by most of the principals but nevertheless eaten up by the public — came out in the papers, including the items that she showered her beloved "Thundering Herd" with gold cigaret cases and cuff-links, furnished several University of California frat houses (which housed her sex-athletes) with bootleg booze, or squandered her cash playing poker in her kitchen with her chauffeur, cook. and maid.

Clara took her bounced secretary, Daisy DeVoe, to the courts, and after a battle royal, with fur and juicy charges flying on both sides, got her packed off to jail for pilfering large sums from her five thousand-dollar-a-week stipend as a Paramount star.

But the lurid headlines — from "Love Balm" to "Thundering Herd" — had damaged the It Girl's reputation beyond repair, and her Paramount contract was terminated by "mutual consent."

In spite of marrying one of her boudoir "regulars," Rex Bell, her career was broken and Clara slid over the edge into her first of a long series of nervous breakdowns.

The downfall of Clara Bow, who was just about every red-blooded American boy's idea of an ideal girl-friend in the Twenties, cinched Hollywood's reputation as a place wicked beyond recall. The

Bela Lugosi was last—but not least.

STAGE BROADWAY SCREEN

VARIETY

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WALL ST. LAYS AN EGG

Going Dumb Is Deadly to Hostess In Her Serious Dance Hall Profesh

A hostess at Roseland has her problems. The paid steppers consider their work a definite profession calling for specialized technique and high-power salesmanship.

"You can, you gotta sell your personality," said one. "Each one of the girls has our own clientele to cater to. It's just like selling dresses in a store—you have to know what to sell each particular customer.

"Some want to dance, some want to talk, some want to get smart, and others are just misunderstood husbands."

Girls applying for hostess jobs at Roseland must be 21 or older. They must work five nights a week. They are strictly on their own, no salary going with the job and the house collecting 10 cents on every 25 cent ticket. To keep her job, a girl must turn in at least 100 tickets a week during the cold months and 50 in the summer months. In a dull week girls buy their own tickets to keep up the record.

If a partner wishes to sit out a dance, he must pay for the privilege. "Sitting-out time" sells at eight tickets an hour, or $2.00. It's usually a poor apart who will come around with less than $2, many kicking in for more for a little social conversation.

The girl who knows her professional dancing trade will keep an ear open for potential "sitter outers," ascertain their hobbies and talk herself into a whole string of tickets. In this way she not only earns money easily, but saves wear and tear on her evening dresses and slippers.

Big money rolls in if she has a good line. One of the most successful girls at Roseland takes this part of her work so seriously that she reads up on current events (sports and stock market included) and has a smattering of current

Back on Winchell

When the Walter Winchells moved into 204 West 48th street, late last month, June, that's Mrs. Winchell, ordered a special room at Walter's ex-theatre sleep den for his late hour nights. She abandoned the Winchell kiddies when her husband drew in at his usual eight o'clock the first morning.

At noon, Walter's midnight, his sound proof room was peopled 4 by as many high C's he awoke with hot four hours of dreams and a growth. Investigated at once, after having signed the lease of course.

Right next door, on the same floor, is the studio of the noted vocal instructor, Kinney. Among his pupils are Ona Munson, Irene Delroy and Marjorie Peterson. They love Winchell like you love carbolic acid.

And Miss Munson is reported to have requested that an amplifier be started hereafter when she runs up the scale.

Demand for Vaude

Springfield, Ill., Oct. 29.

Petitions requesting Public theatres to resume vaudeville in Decatur, Ill. are in circulation in that city.

Petitions specify that vaudeville at one or more of the three larger Public houses would furnish employment to a number of Decatur musicians and stage hands and provide larger variety of local entertainment.

DROP IN STOCKS ROPES SHOWMEN

Many Weep and Call Off Christmas Orders — Legit Shows Hit

MERGERS HALTED

The most dramatic event in the financial history of America in the collapse of the New York Stock Market. The stage was Wall Street, but the onlookers covered the country. Estimates are that 15,000,000 people were in the market at the time.

Tragedy, despair and ruination spell the story of countless thousands of marginal stock traders. Perhaps Manhattan was worst hit in the number of victims. Many may remain broke for the rest of their lives, because the money that disappeared via the ticker tape was the savings of years.

Many people of Broadway are known to have been wiped out. Reports of cuts in show business losing as much as $300,000 in one hour-day. One results consistent to that was that the theatre is enough of a gamble without its people to venture into Wall street.

Prominent showmen, several identified with the picture industry

(Continued on page 64)

FILTHY SHOW OF SHUBERTS GOOD

Kidding Kissers in Talkers Burns Up Fans of Screen's Best Lovers

Talker Crashes Olympus

Paris Oct. 29.

Pan "Follies" and the Pat Morristone newsreel are running this week in Athens, Greece, the first sound picture heard in the birthplace of world culture, and in all Greece, for that matter.

Several weeks ago, Variety's Cairo correspondent cabled that a cinema had been wired in Alexandria, Cleopatra's home town.

Only Sodom and Gommorrah remain to be heard from.

HOMELY WOMEN SCARCE; CAN'T EARN OVER $25

No beauty cure on Broadway!

And now it looks as if Crosby Gaige may have to postpone production of "One Beautiful Evening" because the Main Stem is devoid of the non-beauts necessary for the casting of the show.

Arthur Lubin, caster for the producer, for several weeks has been trying to hand the right type of women. A most unusual piece, the drama has an all-women lineup, and, although as many as 12 are needed, all must be homely and middle age or over, except for two who can be young.

Vera Caspary wrote the play and it centers about conditions at a club for girls where

Boys who used to whistle and girls who used to giggle when love scenes were flashed on the screen are in action again. A couple of years ago they began to take the love stuff seriously and deserted but the talkers are reviving the ha ha for film serial-fans.

Heavy loving lovers of silent picture days accustomed to charming audiences into spasms of silent ecstasy when flowing the leading lady are getting the bird instead of the heartbeat. The sound accompaniment is making it tough.

Such a picture romancer as John Gilbert is getting laughs in place of the sighs of other days, and the flaps who still think he's grand are getting sore. One little flap had to be quieted by an usher when making a commotion during a Gilbert picture at the Capitol, New York. The person sitting next to her became others in the house too. Gilbert's passion fights. The g jumped to his defense and started to laugh out the Gilbert lovers.

Not only has Gilbert received the bird lately, but all of the other screen players who specialize in romance. Charles Farrell in "Seven Days Up" draws many a giggle from his mush stuff.

In the silents when a would whisper like a vestal against his ears passionately preparatory to the clinch and then kiss. It looked pretty natural and was believable. The build up to the kissing now makes a gag of the kiss.

When the kiss is with serious intent the laughs are out of order. It's burning the improved female fans to see their favorite lovers bidden when kissing.

In Reverse

Seems the only type of love stuff

Variety chronicled the end of an era for Hollywood.

round of clergymen, politicians, and purity leagues took up the call once again — with all the furor of the Arbuckle days — and heaped shit upon dung upon its head. It was after Clara Bow had proved to be such a sloshing bucket of sin that Hollywood was labeled with doomsday finality: *"The Cemetary of Virtue."*

Such was the capstone on ten terrible, crazy, scandal-ridden, gaudy and golden years. The Terrible Twenties — with its train of disgrace and fall from glory, its deaths from dope and suicide, its mysterious or covered-up murders — had its sex-and-sin sensations shot like a persistent scarlet thread through the warp and woof of Hollywood's cloth of gold.

The Great Big Golden Illusion ripped wide open on Tuesday, October 29, 1929. Wall Street Laid An Egg — as *Variety* headlined it, and Illusion was crowded right out of Hollywood's nest.

Describing Hollywood's Golden People of the Twenties from a perspective of twenty years, Mae Murray once confided: *"You could say we were like golden dragonflies, suspended over a swamp: we seemed to be suspended effortlessly in the air, but in reality, our wings were beating very, very hard, very, very fast, so fast they were invisible . . ."*

One beautiful, Indian Summer day, in October, 1929, the Golden Gods swept up towards the cruel sun of Glory, which spilt out vengeful fire on their follies and fineries — they fell, and the revenging fire fell even faster over their prideful city. And all that was left was a taste of ashes.

The vainglorious golden dream that Hollywood dreamed of itself, all through the Twenties — that even scandal could not humble — came crashing down in the raucous pandemonium of the Talkies, and the Unblinkable Truth of the Stock Market Crash.

The Great Crash knocked the bejeezus out of the Hollywood dream: for many of the golden people—already shook up by the arrival of the talkies—it was the final day of reckoning.

Typical of the fate of many top stars was that of John Gilbert. He was the highest-paid star of 1928, receiving ten thousand dollars a week from M-G-M after packing 'em in with *The Big Parade.* Marrying Ina Claire on the rebound after his affair with Garbo had fizzled out, Gilbert was in mid-Atlantic, returning from a squabbly honeymoon, when the golden bubble burst.

John Gilbert docked in New York to discover he was *quite* breadless. Like many other Hollywoodians, he had stocks on margin, having fallen for the fast-talking blandishments of one of the investment sharpies who infested the film colony. (He would have done better if he'd slept on his salary—like Emil Jannings—who didn't trust American banks and kept two-hundred-thousand dollars in bills stuffed in his pillow, during his brief fling at Hollywood.)

Jack still had a contract at M-G-M to fall back on, but this was scant solace after his first talkie—a silly thing titled *His Glorious Night*—was dubbed a "shriekie." When the movie opened at the Capitol Theatre on Broadway, the fans who had swooned at his silent glamor shrieked with laughter at his voice, which recorded as a tin-whistle tenor. Gilbert had just about as much chance "making it" in talkies as Hearst had in the political arena.

While Ina Claire's star rose in talkies due to her stage background, John Gilbert was washed up. He took to the bottle, as did another silent star who had "white voice" trouble—Marie Prevost. They staged a drink-to-death race—Marie won by checking out in 1934; Jack the year after. (His *debacle* inspired the screenplay for *A Star Is Born,* although it was

John Gilbert

His talkies shrieked.

the walk-into-the-sea suicide of *another* despondent actor, John Bowers, which was used in that film.)

It was a day of reckoning for the front-office men as well. Wall Street wasn't alone in indulging in financial hanky-panky: a glittering nabob, William Fox, was accused in 1930 of "malfeasance in office, manipulations of assets and misappropriations of funds" and booted from the studio he had built. Adolph Zukor—who had piled up a private fortune of forty million dollars in the Paramount mountain during the Twenties—burned the midnight oil over the books and found he was on the brink of bankruptcy. Incredibly, even Hearst was in hot water, and Marion Davies debanked a million dollars of her Hearstian salary to pull Willie through.

Hollywood had to face with the rest of the nation that "the greatest, gaudiest spree in history" was over. Many of 1929's one-hundred-million regular moviegoers had switched from box-office lines to breadlines; in 1930 attendance slumped forty per cent. Some theaters offered desperate come-ons such as free dishes, two-for-one tickets, double features, and "free marcel wave coupons for the lady patrons." In the grim dawn of the Great Depression, gimmicks weren't enough to lure back the dream-factory faithfuls. Too many of America's factories were closed.

The film industry, though severely shaken by the double-header shocker of the Talkies and the Crash, took stock and pulled through, though the Hollywood mythos took a drubbing in the process. The evil "star system" survived — though the stars themselves of the post-1930 era could only wonder how eternal would be their ascendancy — with the example of fallen idols on every side.

While twenty-six new talkie stars had appeared by 1931, only three stars remained from the stellar roster of 1921.

Mae Murray, Golden Dragonfly of the Twenties.

Joining John Gilbert among the fallen were John Barrymore, Edmund Lowe, Conrad Nagel, Charles Farrell, Buddy Rogers, and William Haines. Ramon Novarro retired to a monastery.

The going was equally rough for the goddesses of the silent screen. Billie Dove, Colleen Moore, Corinne Griffith, Norma Talmadge flickered out with Marie Prevost and scandal-plagued Clara Bow.

For some of the glamor girls the eclipse was brutal: Louise Brooks, one of the loveliest visions ever to grace a screen, spun from stardom to a Macy's counter in a vertiginous fall from glory. The opulent, eccentric, millionairess Princess Mdivani —Mae Murray, "Golden Dragonfly of the Twenties" —was shucked by her doubtfully noble spouse when she lost her fortune, and was arrested one night for

vagrancy when she was found sleeping on a park bench in New York's Central Park. (Mae never "made it" back up, though her self-enchanted belief that *"once you become a star, you are always a star"* persisted till the day she died, at seventy-one —on March 23, 1965.)

The great luminaries of the Twenties, like Mae Murray, truly believed in their *stardom* as a "divine right." It was not only Mae who sought to distinguish herself from ordinary mortals by marrying a title—Gloria Swanson from Chicago became the cool, chic Marquise de la Falaise de Coudray; Pola Negri (ex-Apolonia Chalupec) traded in her Countess Dombska title for that of Princess, marrying the last available Mdivani, Prince Serge, to do so. (A few years later she lost her Prince, her Para-

Pola Negri upstaged everybody

mount contract—and her popularity.)

Other stars of the Twenties had no need to marry bluebloods to proclaim their royalty: Doug Fairbanks and Mary Pickford, enthroned on their pile of blue chips, never doubted they deserved the designation, "King and Queen of Hollywood." (When their star waned with the talkies, they announced their abdication.)

The doubt that Blake claimed fatal for a star—*"If a Star Should Doubt, It Would Immediately Go Out"*—arrived for Hollywood with the Crash, in spades.

In the Anxious Thirties, the stars found plenty of cause to doubt their own divinity. The strain proved too great for many former Greats. Rather than live among the shards when their pinnacle shattered to pieces, they simply chose to "end it all." Some made melodramatic *tableaux* of their self-immolations—gods self-slain on their own strange altars. Hollywood coined a phrase, "has-been," and their suicide became common currency.

Some of the few "lucky stars" who managed to slip through the twin holocaust of Talkies-Crash unscathed, made a great show of pointedly ignoring the grimmer realities, and in particular the grisly end of some of their former peers. They were, not surprisingly, "strong voice" personalities—Ronald Colman, George Arliss, Marie Dressler, Wallace Beery, Greta Garbo, Janet Gaynor, Constance Bennett, Will Rogers, and a jazz-baby whose voice proved very strong indeed: Joan Crawford.

In 1932, in the depths of the Depression, Joan Crawford felt called upon to fortify the nation's morale with a manifesto titled *Spend!*—a valiant declaration of rights of the star, in the movieland Bible, *Photoplay*.

In answer to a groundswell of grumbles across the country that film stars were grossly overpaid,

Joan Crawford said stars should spend money lavishly.

Joan replied it was the *duty* of the star to hold steadfast to the style of living the public associates with that exalted station: *grimly,* with *iron determination,* she must surround herself with the height of luxury, fashionable furs, dazzling jewelry, an ever-replenished wardrobe of fabulous creations —this way, and this way only, are the fans satisfied *while money stays in circulation!*

Bravely, Miss Crawford exhorted her dear public to imitate her—all proportions guarded—to renew confidence in the economic system, "Made in U.S.A." *"I, Joan Crawford, I Believe in the Dollar. Everything I Earn, I Spend!"*

For Joan, at least, the durable cookie who came through the crises with flying colors — it was always *in appearance* the same famous "Hollywood Way of Life" — deluxe sports cars, cascades of *dernier cri* clothes, life outside the studios a whirl of cocktail parties, well-publicized nightclub dates, late-hour love-parties, not always with the same man.

She played it to the hilt, from the preening at premieres to snappy sex sessions at sunrise—but her grand act was a wee bit forced, her bravura a shade desperate. She, like all the other stars, had a good look over the brink, and the abyss of Oblivion had stared right back up at her. Joan knew where she came from and did *not* want to go back there—her studied Luxury Worship was a derisible subterfuge.

The insouciant gaiety of the Golden People — heedless even in the *furia* of scandal — sank out of sight with the Twenties; the Crash killed Hollywood's brassy self-confidence.

In the still night of their gilded souls, the surviving stars — Joan Crawford among them — knew something alien had gnawed its way into the charmed circle: an inextirpable rat named *Angst.*

Scandal was by *no means* absent from the Hollywood scene during that depressed and depressing decade, the Anxious Thirties. It made a razzle-dazzle entrance with 1930's no-holds-barred court battle — "Clara Bow vs. Daisy. DeVoe" — but the show played to a half-empty house.

Even with Clara's love life laid bare in the tabloids, the nation was too stock-shocked to be overly concerned. The Clara-Daisy Affair was above all an unwelcome backwards glance at a binge that was giving everyone a hangover.

In 1931, when Clara flipped her flame-haired lid, her former fans — those Lounge Lizards, Sheiks and Cave Men of the Twenties — got the sack by the millions. While the "Hottest Jazz Baby" cooled it in a rest-home, a multitude faced a harsher music than the Jazz Age. Though Clara made a "comeback" in a talkie the following year — and even sprouted formerly non-existent breasts for the occasion — the public stayed away from *Call Her Savage* in droves. The "Jewel of the Jazz Age" had lost her luster — the public called her *washed up.*

It was back to the private happy farm for Clara — this time she cooled it in ice-watered sheets.

During the Depression years, the Hollywood personalities whose nerves shattered and who sought shelter in deluxe sanitariums were overshadowed by those who wrote their own fadeout. Suicide took Jeanne Eagels, beautiful, brilliant junkie from Broadway, shortly after she had completed her talkie starring role in *Rain* — and the market crashed. Blonde, fragile Jeanne chose the neat way out — an overdose of heroin — the same route chosen by the brunette junkie, Alma Rubens, in 1931, when she was down to the price of *one last fix* . . .

Some stars who had fallen from the firmament were not only broke like Jack Gilbert playing stocks, but were mortgaged and over-extended beyond re-

pair — most important of all: they were *no longer wanted.* Rather than face up to life anywhere else than on the summit, they chose to write *finis* to their careers by hurtling their last limousine over Dead Man's Curve on Sunset Boulevard, like Milton Sills in 1930 . . . or they chose to suck on gas pipes, like young ex-leading man Robert Ames, in 1931 — or blow their brains out — like comic actor Karl Dane, in 1932 . . . A "Hemingway exit" was equally chosen by the M-G-M director George Hill, in 1934. (The specialist in tough-guy and gangster movies like *The Big House* turned a heater on himself for the same reason the author of *The Sun Also Rises* went down on a hunting rifle — *a too-late tumble into homosexuality* — after a latent-lifetime of "baiting queers.")

The Oscar for the most *atrocious* suicide of all time in Hollywood would be won hands down by the silent star of French origin, Lou Tellegen, in 1935 — who by that time was *very* forgotten indeed, and chose the suicide technique utilized by his compatriot, comic film star Max Linder, ten years earlier . . .

Like unhappy funnyman Max Linder (called the "Charlie Chaplin of France"), Lou Tellegen chose *hara-kiri with a pair of scissors.* In Lou's case, they were the gold pair, engraved with his name, that had been so busy in former years with his clippings — in the days he starred as Geraldine Farrar's favorite leading man . . .

Lou — who married Geraldine, some said, to perpetuate their pairing on the screen — surrounded himself with the fat, yellowing scrap-books of their days of glory together; made a circle of his most flattering photos; laid out tattered posters of his greatest triumphs — ranging from *The Long Trail* to *The Redeeming Sin.* Then he squatted, nude, at the center, and set to belaboring his belly and

Lou Tellegen, wife Geraldine Farrar, before his grisly suicide.

chest with furious scissor-stabs until he died, with extruding viscera — *his heart laid bare* — his cherished souvenirs drenched in gore . . .

The slow, "liquid" exits of Marie Prevost in 1934 and Jack Gilbert in 1935 seemed destined for two other lushes, John Bowers and James Murray, but both chose *aquatic* ends: Bowers cut things short by walking nude into the Pacific at Malibu, when Marguerite de la Motte, his wife, gained stardom, while *his* star waned (his demise found a niche on the screen in *A Star Is Born*); ill-starred James Murray, unwanted after being featured in *The Crowd*, jumped into a river in 1937.

Whereas in 1920, the suicides of Olive Thomas

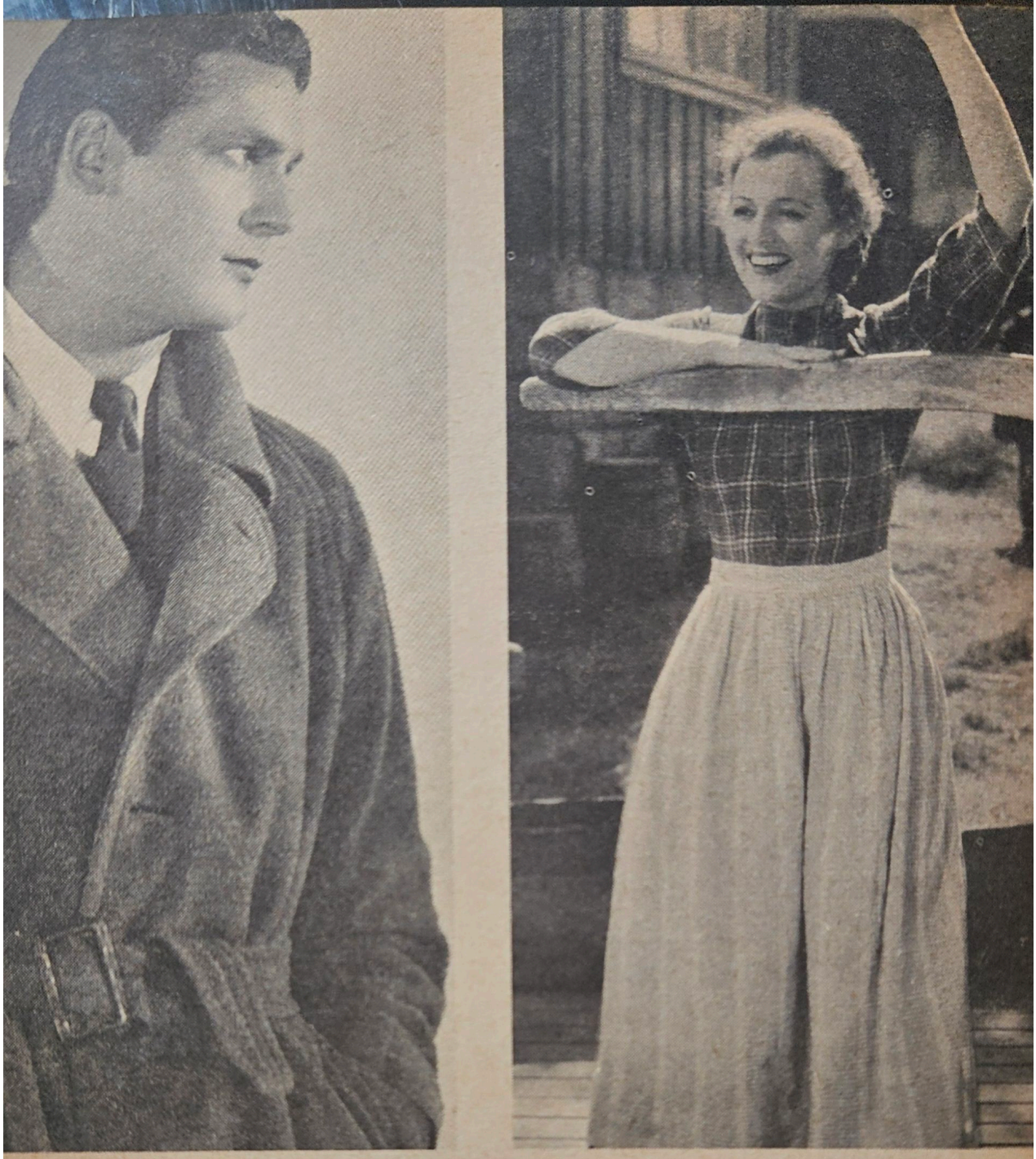
or of Bobby Harron, Griffith's leading man, rated front page coverage, in the Thirties the self-styled fadeouts of former idols of the screen rarely received more than a few lines in the back pages, among the ads for bankruptcy clearances and bargain-basement sales.

Along with the upsurge of suicide in Hollywood during the Anxious Thirties, the other scandalous themes associated with the free-wheeling Twenties but in a desultory appearance: popping up from time to time will be a dope case, a murder case, or the wilder forms of sexual dalliance. Some achieve a certain memorable, macabre grandeur — some seem like pale "remakes" of the scarlet scandals of Hollywood's giddy preceeding decade — when even *mayhem* often seemed madcap!

Aside from those scandals which spilled over into the nation's newspapers — which continued to perpetuate its "reputation" as a sin capital in the public mind — Hollywood has always had its *own* supply of private scandalous chitchat and tattle, tales that went the rounds of the dressing-rooms and studio commissaries, but seldom, ever, saw the light of a gossip column.

Snoop, Peep, and *Eavesdrop* set up shop long before the Thirties in Hollywood, but during the Depression years their product — varying from candid calumny to ruinous rumor — reached a new peak in perfidy. The insecurity of those years brought our peculiar efflorescences in the Hollywood hot-house — and stars struck out at stars — directors enveighed against directors — front-office men maneuvered against studio chiefs.

The gossip-mill worked "round the clock" at such night spots favored by film folk as the *Cocoanut Grove* and the *Trocadero,* on the Sunset Strip . . . The tongues wagged cuttingly during lunch at the *Brown Derby,* waspishly at the dike bar *Mary's,*



Charles Farrell

Janet Gaynor

or at that other "specialized" hangout on the Strip — the *Cafe Gala* — a favorite of Cole Porter, where movieland queens mixed with the kept or monied minions of cafe "gay society."

At these voracious Banquets of Reputations, *any* Hollywood personality was fair game: be it rising young starlet, established star, or faded has-been . . .

During the early Thirties the gossip-ghouls of Hollywood took venomous delight in "devouring" the reputations — *in private* — of the couple *the public* believed the "most romantic love-team" the

Farrell and Gaynor: Their private lives impugned.

screen had ever seen. Even the beloved stars of *Seventh Heaven* and *Street Angel* — the virile giant, Charles Farrell, and the delicate little Janet Gaynor, whose soft-focus smooching had millions of shopgirls wetting their hankies and panties — were tattled about, their intimate private lives impugned.

There were a number of well-publicized screenland marriages that didn't by any means pull the wool over the eyes of Hollywood insiders. One case was that of a romantic, phonily "virilized" leading man — in reality a screaming faggot — who chose

an "arrangement of convenience" with a pretty actress who was a well-known dike. And a ranking actress of ill-concealed Sapphic propensities waltzed to the altar with a top-notch "male" costume designer who *also* needed a cover-up of sorts. These legal arrangements between understanding spouses were known among the filmtown wiseacres as "twilight tandems."

In Hollywood, not just "separate but equal" bedroom arrangements were favorite targets for gossip-sniping, but also *anything* slightly peculiar about the stars' habits or persons, right down to the most *intimate physiological details*:

It was enough for a feminine star to be afflicted with baldness — and *required* to wear wigs off-screen and on, like Marion Davies; or later, Ida Lupino; or later still, an Italian screen beauty who fitfully tried Hollywood — Lollobrigida . . .

Gina Lollobrigida also a false-top

Ida Lupino had to wear wigs

It was sufficient to be equipped with a complete set of "Dresden china" (*false teeth*) like Clark Gable — or on the distaff side, like those two famous foul-mouths, Carole Lombard and Talullah Bankhead — whose Dresden china choppers were slyly credited with *swearing a blue-streak, all by themselves, in their denture-glasses at night on the stars' bedside tables . . .*

Or to treat the ladies rough in the boudoir, like

Tallulah Bankhead, false choppers.

Clark Gable wore China clippers.

a whole platoon of top actors, directors and producers, including the late Victor McLaglen, Wallace Beery and many others, were reputed to do . . .

Or to *like* to be roughed up in the boudoir — to get their kicks out of spanking, wrestling and simulated rape — like Mary Nolan (ex-Imogene Wilson, *la belle masochiste*) — who was said to "bring out the sadist in men" and succeeded so well that she sued a producer in 1935 for $500,000, on charges that he roughed her up not wisely, but too well . . .

Or to like to be bound, whipped and tortured — which was by no means a too uncommon diversion among both, or rather all four, sexes in Hollywood of those days — no more than today. In the middle Thirties there was an elegant mansion hidden away in the Hollywood Hills that catered to all sorts of sado-masochistic tastes, ranging from chains and hot pokers to a do-it-yourself hammer-and-nails kit . . .

Or to like to do it in front of mirrors; there were highly-paid custom glaziers who specialized in equipping Hollywood and Beverly Hills bedroom suites with all-the-way mirrors — including floor and ceiling . . .

Mary Nolan, liked sex rough.

They called James Dean "The Human Ashtray."

Charles Laughton liked kicks in the fanny from young men.

Tyrone Power fancied strange and revolting things.

Or to like beltings on the behind (from females) like Emil Jannings, or kicks in the butt (from young males), like Charles Laughton . . .

Or to "dig" sex assorted with beatings, boots, belts and bondage, like James Dean — *spiced with knowing cigaret burns* (which gave Jimmy his underground nickname: *The Human Ashtray*) . . .

Or to be just plain, old-fashioned shit-fanciers, like Ty Power, or like a notorious latter-day producer, who is known to his coterie of starlets as *The Excrement Man* . . .

Or to have "tons of meat" — like well-endowed Chaplin; or like another reputedly genitaly-generous gentleman, Bogart — the slight, bald little fellow known for the *"biggest jing-jang in show biz"* . . .

Or to have just a *teeny* weenie, like a certain top matinee idol who still gets around . . .

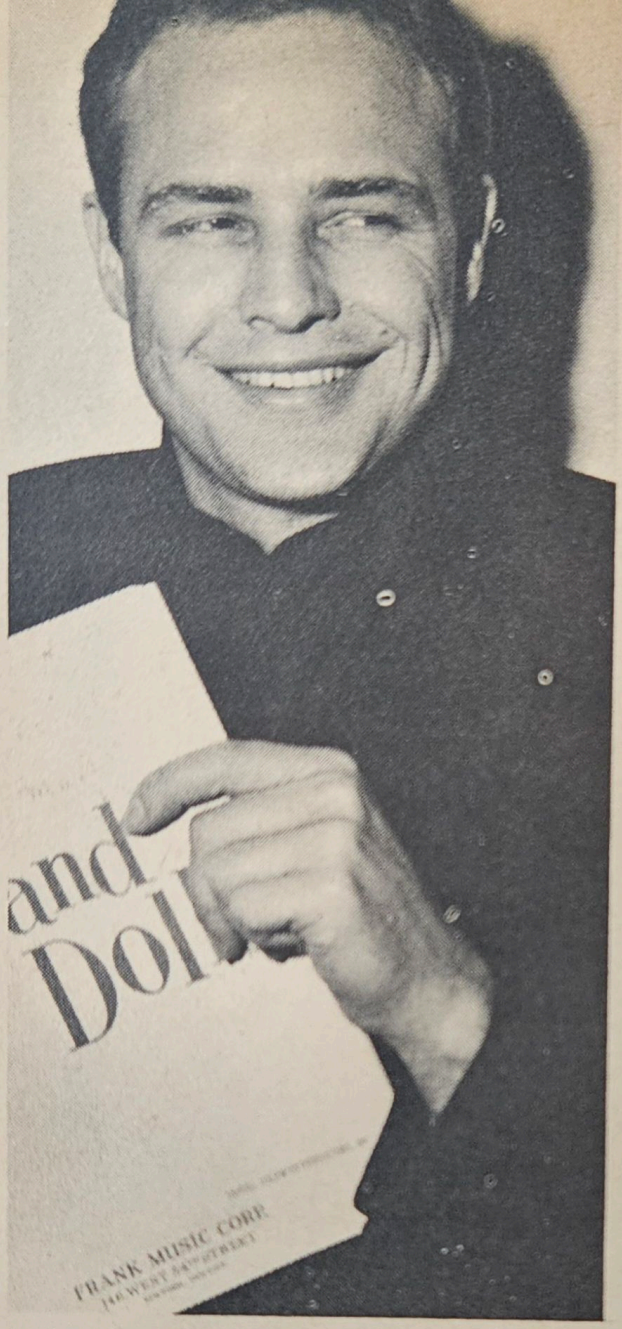
Or just to be endlessly jumping in bed with every Tom, Dick, Harry, mechanic or bellhop.

Not infrequently, the whispered or shouted gossip was backed up by formal charges that were aired in court — as in the cases of Charlie Chaplin, Fatty Arbuckle and many others. In recent memory, Marlon Brando's ex-wife, Anna Kashfi, charged in her divorce suit that he tied her to the conjugal bed and spanked her.

Among the actors, it was tattled that Gary Cooper "went thataway" with a sweet-talking "shut-mah-mouth" handsome young, Southern tobacco heir — who acted as his social mentor for two years — before Lupe Velez' brand of spitfire brought Gary back to the straight, if not the narrow . . . (Gary was so grimly, goldarned-anxious to *make good* in his early days in Hollywood that he would drop his Montana jeans for *anyone* he thought could shove him a rung up the ladder — from assistant casting-director to an itinerant British lensman for *Vanity Fair* — whose snobbism did not preclude a grope at six-foot-three Gary's buckskin basket . . .)

The up-and-coming actors speculated endlessly on how to parry a bed-minded director without blowing the dangled part — or the more *adaptable* passed tips on how to jockey the jokers in the casting-office who kept glancing over the casting couch.

That does not mean the film industry was endlessly permissive towards those with twilight proclivities. Even such a top-drawer director as James Whale, known as the "Ace of Universal" after his *Frankenstein* made a mint for that studio, was blackballed out of the industry after his taste for the tender bottoms of Boy Scouts became too well known. (Whale retired, a rich man, to his Pacific Palisades mansion, where fifteen years later he was murdered by a good-looking beach boy — *whose*



Marlon Brando

Gary Cooper, so anxious.

F. W. Murnau, man of strange great talent and stranger tastes.

unfinished nude portrait in oils by Whale, the amateur painter, told a tale that the English aristocrat — found floating in his swimming pool with his head bashed in—could neither confirm nor deny . .)

There has been endless tattle over the years about another very rich, esteemed, if stagy dirctor, whose endless *"promises, promises,"* to an endless stud parade would seem to leave him wide open for the fate that befell Whale. But he takes 'em in, promises 'em the sky, sucks 'em dry — and *kicks 'em out* with clockwork regularity while *not one* of the dumb, duped hustlers who lasted a fortnight at the mansion on the hill has ever found his way before the cameras of the man who, after all, is known as a "woman's director."

Still another illustrious director, who ironically was responsible for the rocketing careers of two of Hollywood's most notorious (whispered) homosexuals — a top actor and actress who successfully masked their activities for a long time with the customary "twilight tandem" snow-job — himself came in the line of fire for his gay proclivities, with a grotesquely tragic windup.

It was bandied about the Fox lot that Friedrich Wilhelm Murnau, who ruled like a Jupiter at that studio since his importation from Germany in 1927, was re-restablishing the precedent set by Nazimova of "all-gay" casting for his films.

Not only did the super-abundance of *known* homos in Murnau's casts speak for itself, but anyone who appeared in his pictures — even the athletic male stars of *Sunrise* and *Four Devils* — came automatically under suspicion. While the rumors about Murnau were passed from studio to studio by other directors — jealous of his Teutonic talent, and great prestige following *Sunrise* — the innuendoes remained on the whispering level. It was only after Murnau had returned to Hollywood in 1931, follow-

ing his work in Tahiti filming *Tabu,* that the event occurred that placed Murnau once and for all "beyond the pale" for his sexual inclinations. Murnau was beyond caring; he was dead.

The scandal surrounding the circumstances of Murnau's death began to take form when the director took into his employ a beautiful Spanish-Filipino boy named Garcia Stevenson — *fourteen years old* — ostensibly as his personal "valet" (though it was later assumed *other services* were indicated). Garcia, for his part, bragged of his abilty as a chauffeur (although he was just a *shade* too young for a driver's license) among other kinds of prowess — casting a covetous eye on the powerful Packard limousine — which Murnau had rented from the Tanner Motors Livery, to fill his needs for the brief time before his planned voyage to Germany.

Garcia's hankering for the driver's wheel was to find fulfillment on March 11, 1931 — during a trip from Hollywood to Carmel undertaken by Murnau, to visit the author, William Morris — who planned to write a book based on the film, *Tabu.* Other occupants of the limousine — aside from Murnau and his young "valet" — were the chauffeur furnished by Tanner Motors, John Freeland; Ned Marin, manager of the sound company which synchronized *Tabu;* and Murnau's German shepherd dog, Pal.

Following Highway 101 on the trip north, the Tanner chauffeur stopped for gas at the Rio Grande Oil Station, at Elwood, twelve miles before Santa Barbara. When Freeland returned from checking the tires he found Garcia behind the wheel, and he asked the youth if he thought he was going to drive.

"The old man told me to," Garcia answered nonchalantly, as he puffed on a black Soubranie cigaret.

When the "old man" — Murnau, who was forty-

Murnau behind camera: Was an "all-gay" cast in front?

two at the time — returned from the men's room, he took the front seat beside Garcia, while Freeman piled into the back with Ned and Pal.

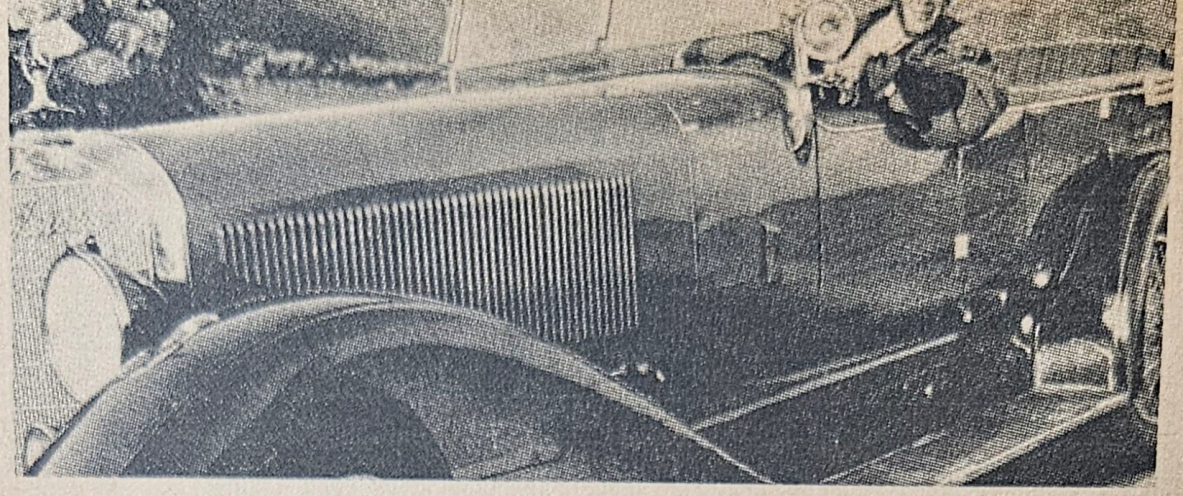
During the five miles while Garcia was driving, Freeland claimed he warned Garcia several times *"You'd better slow down"* because, as he pointed out later at the inquest *"he couldn't keep his foot off the throttle."*

The scandalous story that soon spread through Hollywood was that Murnau couldn't keep *his* mouth off of Garcia, and thereby contributed to the accident that caused his death — when the Packard swerved off the road to the left — and crashed to the bottom of an embankment, at five in the afternoon.

The story that flew like wildfire around the film colony was that the injuries which proved fatal to Murnau were caused by being crushed by the steering wheel, *beneath which he was crouched at the time of the accident* — between the spread thighs of his heedless young Nemesis. The scandalized whispers affirmed that Murnau was in the process of blowing his swarthy young boyfriend, whose approaching orgasm involuntarily caused *his leg to tauten . . . his foot to throttle . . . until the fatal skid occurred.* Garcia and the others, including the Tanner chauffeur who claimed he had "dozed off" at the time of the accident (Hollywood tattle claimed Murnau had tipped him a tenspot to "pretend to go to sleep") escaped with minor injuries, while Murnau died in a Santa Barbara hospital later that evening, his face turned to the wall.

When Murnau's body was returned to Hollywood for the funeral services, the whispered campaign of calumny had done its work so well that only eleven brave friends showed up among the scores of the director's associates, at the Pierce Brothers' Funeral Home. These included Murnau's closest German friends in Hollywood, Salka and Berthold Viertel; Greta Garbo; George O'Brien; William K. Howard; Thomas Mirande; Edgar Ulmer, the director's assistant Herman Bing (who shot himself in Hollywood in 1947) and three members of Murnau's household staff — *just eleven people in all.*

Greta Garbo was one of only eleven to show up at Murnau's rites.



Murnau's Mercedes was flashy but his Packard was lethal.

Among those notable by their absence were the aforementioned pair who owed their screen fame in large measure to the German genius, but who panicked at attending the obsequies of a known "pervert" — with the same delicacy with which they sought sanctuary behind their "normal" marital fronts.

Greta Garbo requested a death mask be made of Murnau at the funeral home before the casket was sealed for shipment to Germany. The solitary Swede is known to have kept this funerary souvenir of the solitary German — like her, a confirmed bachelor to the end — on the desk of her Hollywood home, all the years she remained in the film capital.

Tabu was acclaimed a masterpiece when Murnau's final film was premiered on March 18, 1931, in New York City.

Hollywood breathed easier when the sorry little funeral was over, on March 19, and the casket of *Sunrise's* creator sailed out of sight for Germany, into the sunset.

The sad truth is that the moguls of Hollywood, and in particular the financially finagling William Fox, had been, all along, singularly ill at ease in their dealings with a genius of Murnau's stature, and were only too happy to write him off as something *abnormal,* as much from the standpoint of his artistic integrity as his unorthodox sex life . . .

The least that can be said is that F. W. Murnau went down in Hollywood film history.

Another German import to Hollywood that jealous and venomous tongues tried their best to annihilate was that distinctly unusual woman, Marlene Dietrich. Marlene was actually Frau Sieber when she arrived under Paramount auspices in 1930, and had hubby Rudolf in tow — if you looked closely. (Show business has *never* known a more shadowy and self-effacing spouse than Rudolf Sieber.)

Much more in evidence was the snappily-dressed bantam cock of a man sporting a walking stick and a Mandarin mustache — who discovered Marlene singing suggestive duos with another girl in one of Berlin's notorious cabarets. He was Joe Sterne, whose Hollywood director-moniker was fancied up as "Josef von Sternberg." (The aristocratic allusion "von" was directly inspired by Erich von Stroheim — whose "von" was also an act — his real name being Erich Stromme. These two expatriates from *Alt Wien* — both of working-class Jewish backgrounds — ended up out-Hunning the Huns.)

Hollywood's gossips were not greatly concerned over Marlene's marital status, or even — at the outset — with her "status" in regard to Joe Sternberg. Speculation was rife, however, over what Hollywood dubbed "Marlene's Sewing Circle."

This "circle" was composed of some of the film colony's wilder women — a Thirties equivalent to Nazimova's "Sapphic Circle" of the Twenties. (These ladies were less exclusive in their tastes than Alla's disciples, and were known as "Gillette Blades" for their double-edge diversions with *both* sexes.)

Scandalized gossip reported that Marlene was "carrying on" outrageously with another top Paramount star, at the time the star was being decorously decadent on the screen—sloshing through asses'-milk baths and assorted wickedness in one of

"Baldy" DeMille's super-phony religious "epics" of those early days. Marlene *hardly* laid the rumors to rest by appearing at the premiere of that picture at Grauman's Chinese Theater, wearing a *man's tuxedo* — accompanied by *two escorts* — Gary Cooper *and Lili Damita.*

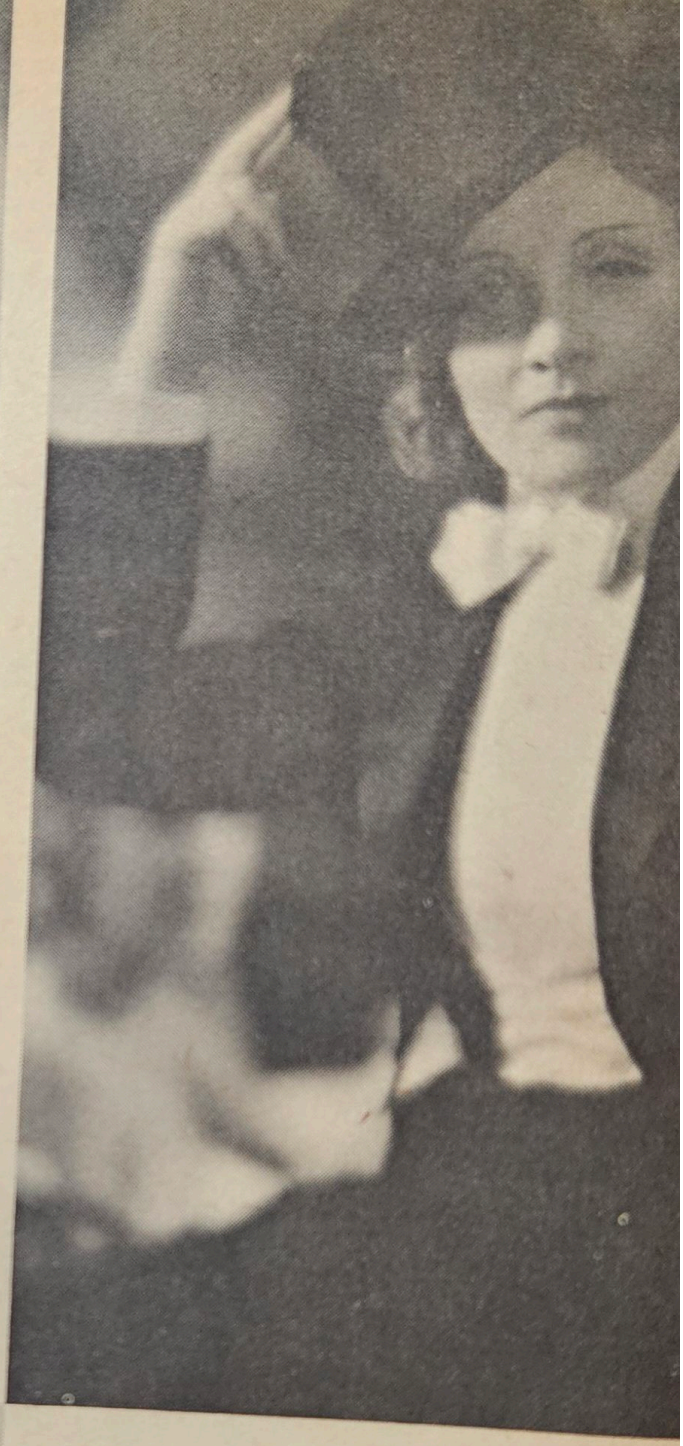
Malicious gossip linked Lili with Marlene's rumored "Sewing Circle," but the hot-blooded little Latin and the haughty blonde Teuton didn't seem to get along too well together; jealousy reared its head, and there were some knockdown, fur-flying fights. Lili later switched from AC back to DC and became the first Mrs. Errol Flynn — an equally tempestuous match.

After Lili had wilted in Marlene's eye, the blonde German glamor girl was linked with a slightly more sedate — if not more respectable — "older woman," a super-sophisticated, *tres snob* authoress.

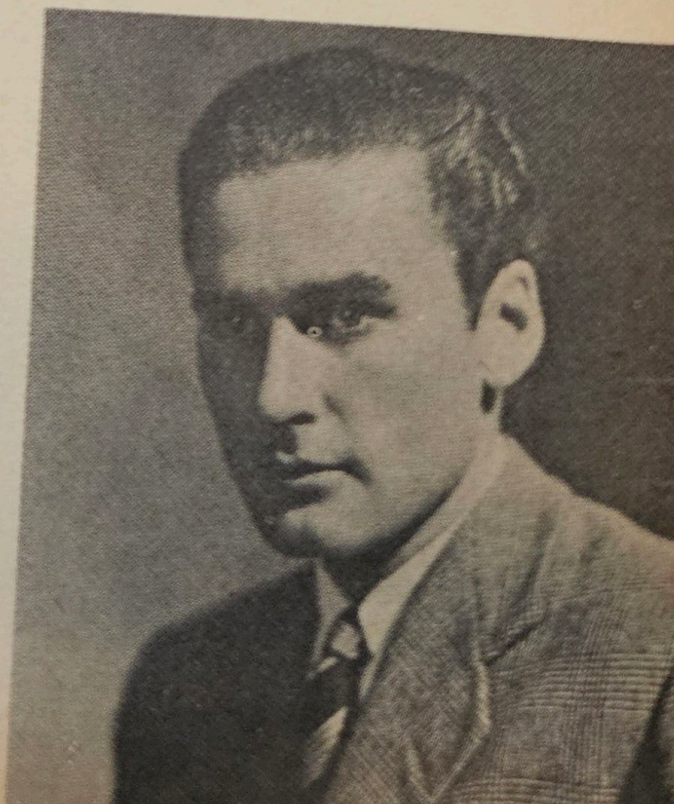
Then the top-level Lesbian international grapevine really began warming up, and some *very* rich women — cafe society figures known the world over — began flying into Hollywood to pay Marlene unabashed court.

Hollywood almost lost Marlene to one millionairess — the eccentric, brilliant bull-dike Jo Carstairs — who affected butch haircut, butch garb, swabby's swagger, yachts and a frank face, free of makeup. Jo came on like Gang Busters with Dietrich — and swept her off for salty, foam-tossed weekends cruising up and down the California coast. Jo lost no time in proposing — offering to buy out Marlene's Paramount contract and free her from

Josef Von Sternberg ended up out-hunning the Huns.



There are tangled relationships among (above) Lily Damita, (top right) Marlene Dietrich, (below) Claudette Colbert, and (bottom right) Errol Flynn. (Opposite page) La Dietrich with Gary Cooper.



the *ennui* of Hollywood's ermine-lined swimming pools — trading Frau Sieber for Frau Carstairs. Dietrich looked the proposition over for a number of nautical weekends — decided it was not boss to be bossed by a yachtswoman — and went back to the Paramount pond.

It was in 1932 that Marlene started going in for off-screen male attire in a big way — so publicly that the cat was let out of the bag concerning her "original" tastes — to the entire nation.

Marlene took to trousers like a duck takes to water — and this had *never* been done before in America. The squawk was huge — but before long Marlene's drag-camping was being copied by other daring young ladies — not dikey at all — and lo and behold, the husky-voiced blonde from Berlin's bawdiest gay-girl cabaret caused a minor revolution in American mores: the vogue for *slacks* was born. (The Thirties' housewives who adopted the fad by the millions — thereby confirming European suspicions about American women—certainly got a boost from adding another pair of pants to the family, but would have fainted dead away had anyone clued them in to the fashion's decidedly "dikey" origin.)

With her marvelous sense of humor, somehow Marlene got away with it all, and remained invulnerable to the scandal-mongers. Like an androgynous Aphrodite, she was adored by Adams and Amazons alike.

Hollywood found a fertile field of speculation, as well, in the singular Trilby-Svengali relationship of Marlene Dietrich and her discoverer and director, if not her actual "creator" — Joe Sternberg.

Sophisticates noticed that in every Sternberg film starring Dietrich there was *invariably* a scene with Marlene in drag—sporting a black or white tux in *Morocco* or *Blonde Venus;* military cap in *Shanghai Express;* whole or partial male uniform in *Scarlet*

Fertile field for gossip about Marlene and Joe Sternberg.

Empress or *The Devil Is A Woman. Could it be — it was openly wondered — that Sternberg had a sexual hang-up on broads in stud's duds?*

While Hollywood's inner spheres babbled wildly about the weirdo duo, Sternberg's wife (he too was married) thought *something* funny was going on — fetishism or no fetishism.

Mrs. Risa Royce von Sternberg got a divorce suit going, and in the sensational trial she came out and publicly named Marlene as responsible for *"alienating the affections of my husband."* After Marlene called her a "thing or two" in court and out, Risa slapped Dietrich with a suit for libel . . . the action was settled out of court.

After the fiasco at the box-office of Sternberg's dazzling *Scarlet Empress* — shot through with off-beat sexual innuendo — *Vanity Fair*, the mouthpiece of the intelligentsia, let loose with the following blast:

"Sternberg traded his open style for fancy play,

chiefly upon the legs in silk, and buttocks in lace, of Dietrich, of whom he has made a paramount slut. By his own token, Sternberg is a man of meditation as well as a man of action: but instead of contemplating the navel of Buddha, his umbilical perseverance is fixed on the navel of Venus."

The kiss-off came in 1935, when an even *more* brilliant exercise in style — *The Devil Is A Woman* — cooler than cool — flaked out completely at the box-office.

Oddly, Marlene was not labeled at that time "box-office poison" but the blame was loaded on her Mandarinesque director. When Spain's Republican government was dense enough to consider that *The Devil Is A Woman* offended the shakeable dignity of their sacrosanct (and soon Fascist) Guardia Civil — demanding a total ban and the burning of all copies — Paramount hastened to comply. A show-piece *auto-da-fe* was staged in front of the Spanish Embassy in Washington, and the demonic *Devil Woman* fed to the flames. The production head of Paramount, Ernst Lubitsch, gave his blessings to this Spanish flight of fanciful superstition, as he and the rest of the studio were ready to give walking-papers to the artsy-craftsy little jinx they had dubbed "Josefine."

From that point on, Sternberg was as washed up in Hollywood as an "ace director" as Stroheim had been, five years earlier. In time, he would be forced to sell his superelegant modernistic castle — complete with moat — in San Fernando valley, and even part with his lovingly assembled library of international erotica — which was acquired *en bloc* by the late Dr. Kinsey, and today is preserved in the *sanctum sanctorum* of the library of the Institute for Sex Research, on the campus of the University of Indiana.

Marlene went on to become legend — with other

Marlene offends Spain with film **The Devil Is a Woman.**

boy-friends; other girl-friends; other directors. When some of the latter, in later days, proved exasperatingly incompetent, the ageless glamor girl has been heard to mutter to herself, before the microphone or under the misplaced spotlights: *"Where are you, Joe? Where are you?"*

The year *The Devil Is A Woman* went up in flames in Washington — 1935 — there was also much question of burning during a sensational trial in Hollywood. The object adjudged fit for incineration was the incendiary diary of one Lucille Langehanke — better known as the throaty-voiced, auburn-haired sultry siren of the screen: Mary Astor.

Mary Astor had a hobby, quaint and Bronte-ish for a movie star: she liked to write, most of all, *all* about herself. Not that she ever dreamed of publishing the contents of her little Blue Diary, with its pages covered with fine, ultrafeminine, flowing script that graphologists have affirmed is remarkably "free from inhibitions."

The contents of Mary's Blue Diary were *quite* as free as her easygoing penmanship. Since the diary covered a secret, extra-conjugal affair Mary was having with that brilliant spirit of Gotham, playwright and wit, George S. Kaufman — in breathless lay-by-lay narrative, chronicled in orgasmic detail — it staggers the imagination that a bright lady like Mary could have been such a dunce as to leave it laying around her Hollywood bedroom, unhidden and unlocked, where her husband might happen upon it.

The cuff-link Dr. Franklyn Thorpe was hunting when he set to rummaging through the bedroom drawers was never found, but when he idly opened the blue leather volume, tossed amongst Mary's undies, his eyes fell on a rhapsodic eulogy of his wife's *physical* link with another man, who had *". . . remarkable staying power. I don't see how he does it!"*

As the put-out physician *flipped* — and flipped to the first pages of the diary, he learned the man who "stayed" so well was the well-known man-about-New York, Kaufman. His movie actress wife

Broadway Lothario George Kaufman.

Mary in **The Woman From Hell.**

had met the Broadway Lothario at the modish Hotel Algonquin, during a clothes-buying trip to New York in the summer of 1933 — which meant the good doctor had been wearing horns for sixteen months. Mary recorded her very first meeting with her married paramour after they had been introduced by a mutual friend, Miriam Hopkins, in these glowing terms:

"His first initial is G. — George Kaufman — and I fell like a ton of bricks. I met him Friday . . . Saturday he called for me at the Ambassador and we went to the Casino for lunch and had a very gay time . . ."

After taking in a performance of Kaufman's smash hit, *Of Thee I Sing*, at the Music Box Theatre, Mary was shown how to do the town for the next few nights — nightclubs, fashionable dives, chic penthouse cocktail parties. Following that weekend, the dismayed medic read the hop, skip

and jump that took Mary into infidelity:

"Monday — We ducked out of the boring party . . . It was very hot so we got a cab and drove around the park a few times and the park was, well, the park, and he held my hand and said he'd like to kiss me but didn't.

"Tuesday night we had a dinner at 'Twenty-One' and on the way to see 'Run Little Chillun' he did kiss me — and I don't think either of us remember much what the show was about. We played kneesies during the first two acts, my hand wasn't in my own lap during the third . . . It's been years since I've felt up a man in public, but I just got carried away . . .

"Afterward we had a drink some place and then went to a little flat in 73rd Street where we could be alone, and it was all very thrilling and beautiful. Once George lays down his glasses, he is quite a different man. His powers of recuperation are amazing, and we made love all night long . . . It all worked perfectly, and we shared our fourth climax at dawn . . .

"I didn't see much of anybody else the rest of the time — we saw every show in town, had grand fun together and went frequently to 73rd Street where he fucked the living daylights out of me . . .

"One morning about 4 we had a sandwich at Reuben's, and it was just getting daylight, so we drove through the park in an open cab, and the birds started singing, and it was a cool and dewy day and it was pretty heavenly to pet and french . . . right out in the open . . ."

Dr. Thorpe could not have been too edified to find his wife carrying on with such singleness of mind in Central Park at dawn, but in view of such enthusiastic endorsements of George's amatory talents it is hardly surprising he found a few

pages further on:

"Was any woman ever happier? It seems that George is just hard all the time . . . I don't see how he does it, he is perfect."

The betrayed husband discovered that the affair had been continued right under his nose, when Kaufman and his collaborator, Moss Hart, spent a few days in Hollywood before setting up their Winter writing headquarters in Palm Springs. Thorpe read on and found out that one morning in February, 1934, when Mary told him she was going to the studio for a costume fitting, she had gone to the Beverly Wilshire Hotel for a costume-less reunion with her man from New York City, instead. She noted all down unrestrainedly, as was her wont:

"Monday I went to the Beverly Wilshire and was able to see George alone for the first time. He greeted me in pajamas, and we flew into each other's arms. He was rampant in an instant, and in a few moments it was just like old times . . . he tore out of his pajamas and I never was undressed by anyone so fast in all my life . . . Later we went to Vendome for lunch, to a stationer's shop . . . then back to the hotel. It was raining and lovely. It was wonderful to fuck the entire sweet afternoon away . . . I left about 6 o'clock."

Thorpe read on to see what kind of "rest" Mary had been indulging in on following weekends in Palm Springs:

"Sat around in the sun all day — lunch in the pool with Moss and George and the Rogers — dinner at The Dunes — a drink in the moonlight WITHOUT Moss and Rogers. Ah, desert night — with George's body plunging into mine, naked under the stars . . ."

When the showdown came and the doctor confronted his straying wife with her infidelity — as

revealed in her own writing — it would be natural to assume the actress would abandon the betraying little blue book. Not Mary Astor. She was soon recording her husband's reactions in the diary:

"He was very badly broken up for several days, used his final weapon with me, 'I need you,' *with tears.*

For the sake of peace and respite from all this emotionalism, I told him I would do nothing at the present. My main reason for saying that is, quite honestly, I want to be able to see George for the rest of his stay here without being all upset — looking like hell. I want to have the last few times

Mary, William Boyd, Louis Wolheim in **Two Arabian Knights.**

of completely enjoying him . . ."

Mary's refusal to break off the affair caused Thorpe to retaliate with a number of affairs with starlets, which became common gossip in Hollywood. It was surprising therefore to many when this "one-night-stander" sued Mary Astor for divorce in April, 1935, and for the custody of their little daughter, Marilyn.

The simple reason Mary did not contest the divorce was due to the fact that Dr. Thorpe had "appropriated" the red-hot Blue Diary before she left the palatial abode, and was holding it against her.

But the prospect of being deprived of her daughter caused Mary to be smitten by a severe case of mother love, and to regain little Marilyn, she filed counter-suit on July 15.

Mary Astor's estranged husband lived up to his threat to "use" the Blue Diary against her. The very first day of the trial, the scorching chronicle was immediately brought up by Thorpe's lawyers.

The presiding judge, "Goody" Knight — later governor of California, took one peek into the pages of the Blue Diary — and banned it from evidence. But Thorpe's lawyers leaked to the press savory excerpts that left little doubt of the kind of action that was involved, including the soon-to-be-famous "*Ah, desert night . . .*" which trailed off into asterisks — and trailed *into* the nation's salacious imagination. The tabloids got going on the story with a full treatment of tall headlines and innuendo, and the country had recovered just enough from the Depression to pay attention.

Mary Astor got back her daughter when Marilyn's nurse — a prim little nun-like creature — described just what had been going on in the Astor mansion since Mary moved out. She described a starlet, Norma Taylor, starting screaming fights

with Thorpe in front of little Marilyn, and noted that Norma was clad only in red toenail polish at the time. She further stated that not only Norma Taylor, but three other blonde showgirls, had "slept in the doctor's bed" on alternate nights. Asked where the doctor was on these evenings, she had the same answer for all:

"He was in his bed, too."

The court was convinced — Mary got back the mansion, and was awarded the custody of little Marilyn. Mary had won — *in spite* of her transcendental passion for the person of George S. Kaufman.

Mary did *not* get back her Blue Diary, however. The court impounded the volume as a piece of . . . "pornography," and as such, it was condemned to be burned.

Surrounded by prune-faced nebbishes acting out an absurd rite of public virtue, "HOLLYWOOD'S HOTTEST LOVE DIARY" — as the tabs had headlined it — was purified by fire. (The "destruction" was pure form; Thorpe's lawyers and others had copies *in extenso*.)

It is significant to note that Mary Astor's screen career *did not* go glimmering after all this torrid exposure. Hollywood took note, as it was confirmed that Mary's box-office had actually *climbed* after all the to-do over her carefully noted love life.

Kaufman managed to duck the subpoenas that went out for him at the time of the trial, and skipped to New York. He managed to dodge most queries concerning his part in the scandal, but once when reporters cornered him at the stage door of the Music Box Theatre, he quipped:

"You may say *I* did not keep a diary."

Court impounded Mary's hot diary as "piece of pornography."

In 1932 there occurred an incredible act of defiance to the sacrosanct Hays Office: Mae West, Sex Queen of Broadway, was brought to Hollywood by Paramount in a desperate move to hypo their flagging box-office.

Mae West rode into town with a reputation as the "bad girl of Broadway" for such self-authored, self-starring plays as *Sex*—for which she served eight days in jail—and the smash hit *Diamond Lil,* a play that is part of Broadway folklore.

When Mae arrived in Hollywood during the summer of 1932 she quipped: "I'm not a little girl from a little town makin' good in a big town. I'm a big girl from a big town makin' good in a little town."

Paramount's move in importing La West was a shrewd one: she stole the show with a supporting role in her first film, *Night After Night,* and thereafter got the studio nabobs to allow her to write her own stories, racy dialog, and practically direct her own pictures. Her following film, *She Done Him Wrong*—a clever adaptation of her play, *Diamond Lil*—broke box-office records for 1933, reaping a two million dollar profit in three months, and saved Paramount from bankruptcy.

Variety wrote of *She Done Him Wrong:* "Miss West in picture hats, strait-jacket gowns and with so much jewelry she looks like a Knickerbocker ice plant, sings *Easy Rider, A Guy What Takes His Time* and *Frankie and Johnny.* All somewhat cleaned up lyrically—but Mae couldn't sing a lullaby without making it sexy . . . As full of laughs as an agent is of alibis, the entire production depends on the personality of the 'Sex' star who gets across each jibe and point with a delivery that will soon be imitated . . . Her handling of lovers, past, present and prospective comprises the whole picture."

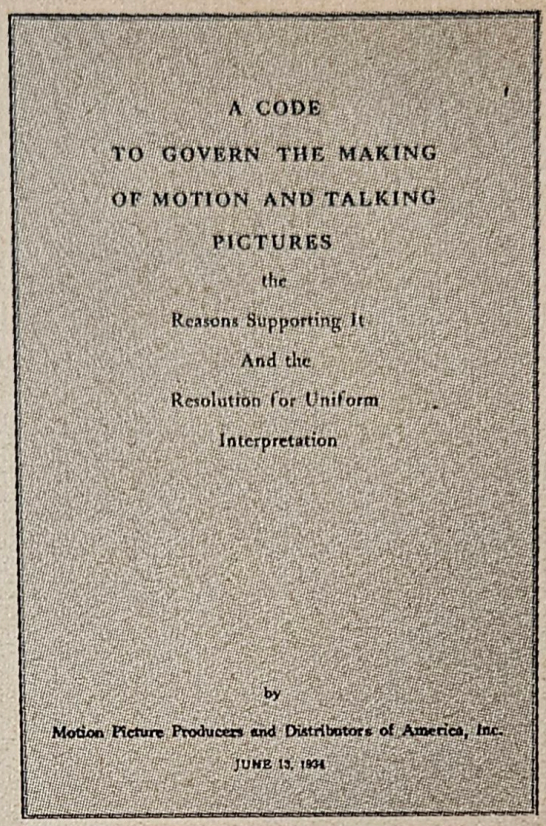
Mae West hit town with reputation as "Bad Girl of Broadway."

Mae, George Raft in her first picture, **Night After Night.**

Flaming Mae now retired.

Not everyone was ready to leap on the West bandwagon. A Hollywood holdout was recently-retired Mary Pickford, who commented from Pickfair: "I passed the door of my young niece's room—she's been raised, oh, so carefully—and I heard her singing bits from that song from *Diamond Lil*—I say 'that song' just because I'd blush to quote the title even here." (The song was *A Guy What Takes His Time.*)

A more serious form of opposition to Mae West's fun-loving view of sex as a capital sport came from Cardinal Mundelein of Chicago, who was "aroused" in a tediously spoil-sport way and set about stirring up the bishops throughout the country. The Cardinal got a Jesuit priest, the Rev. Daniel A. Lord, to author a hellfire pamphlet, *The Motion Pictures Betray America,* commanding that Catholic youth boycott the "obnoxious pictures" that would henceforth be blacklisted in Father Lord's magazine, *The Queen's Work.*


A CODE
TO GOVERN THE MAKING
OF MOTION AND TALKING
PICTURES
the
Reasons Supporting It
And the
Resolution for Uniform
Interpretation
by
Motion Picture Producers and Distributors of America, Inc.
JUNE 13, 1934

Hollywood browbeaten into accepting Production Code.

The Catholic sodalists were so gratified at the response that they decided to extend their boycott on a national level. Another of Cardinal Mundelein's henchmen, Bishop Bernard J. Sheil, auxiliary bishop of Chicago, set about organizing a national pressure group. Thus the "National Legion of Decency" came into existence with Archbishop McNicholas of Cincinnati as its dictator. The Episcopal Committee on Motion Pictures formed the Legion of Decency in October, 1933 — six months after the release of *She Done Him Wrong*. They cited one of the absolute reasons for the necessity of this organization as none other than Mae West — who thus became a "founding mother" of the Legion.

Mae followed *She Done Him Wrong* with her most successful picture, *I'm No Angel,* and had begun another Western, *It Ain't No Sin,* when the clampdown campaign on the Hollywood product began. *It*

Ain't No Sin was the first film to feel the renewed zeal of Mr. Hays, with Catholic pressure breathing down his neck. Mr. Hays insisted that the title be changed: *It Ain't No Sin*, a wonderful summation of Westian sexual philosophy, flouted Judaeo-Christian morality — which thinks sex *is* a sin — too flagrantly, and the film was released as the innocuous, bowdlerized, *Belle of the Nineties.*

Up a creek with the title change was the Paramount publicist who had been working on a zany publicity stunt for the movie: he put fifty parrots in a room with a record that repeated the original title over and over. By the time the studio knuckled under to Hays and retitled the picture, the publicist had fifty parrots who would say *It Ain't No Sin* on cue . . . to no avail.

Father Daniel A. Lord had made his way to Hollywood by this time, and proceeded to teach befuddled Will Hays a thing or two about censorship. He dusted off Hays' old list of "Do's and Don'ts" and with the help of a Catholic layman, Martin Quigley, wrote a new set of censorship laws under the title "A Code To Govern The Making of Motion and Talking Pictures" — incorporating every conceivable modal ban to emasculate the flickers. Presbyterian Hays was shown how to mind his P's and Q's by Catholics Lord and Quigley, and Joseph I. Breen was installed to enforce the Code with a new weapon, the "Purity Seal," without which release of a picture was denied.

With the Code in effect from the summer of 1934 on, Mae had her inevitable run-ins with the new super-guardians of cinema virtue, who objected for instance to Mae's greeting a ganster in one of her moives with the quip: "Is that a gun in your pocket, or are you just glad to see me?"

While working on *It Ain't No Sin*, the Hays Office had a "watchdog" stationed on the set to over-

see La West's lines and hippy gyrations, and it was undoubtedly to bug this bluenose that Mae indulged in an outrageous stunt: on the pretext she, like Shirley Temple, had been threatened with kidnapping, she kept herself surrounded at the studio by a squad of muscular young "bodyguards," who even accompanied her into her sumptuous dressing-room-lounge between takes. Mae locked the door after hanging out a sign reading *"Do Not Disturb—Except In Case Of Fire."*

Mae was furious with the on-the-spot censor, and remarked at the time: "I resent a type of censorship that quibbles over every line as if a devil were hiding behind each word. The most harmless of lines, when I speak them, become suddenly suspect . . . The censor man asked me, 'What do you mean?' "I can't tell you because it isn't something you can explain by numbers. You can take it or leave it."

Despite the square on the set, Mae got by with such gems in the film as, "It is better to be looked over than overlooked," and, "A man in the house is worth two in the street."

Even William Randolph Hearst got into the anti-Westian act when he singled out her 1936 movie, *Klondike Annie,* in which Mae played a police fugitive who impersonates a Salvation Army lassie in Alaska, as a target for his aging ire. Raging on the editorial page of his thirty-five newspapers, Hearst denounced Mae as a "monster of lubricity" and a "menace to the Sacred Institution of the American Family," concluding, "Is it not time Congress did something about Mae West?" (Marion Davies, in her cups, was seen enjoying the film hugely at a Hollywood screening, and could never see what "Pops" had gotten so excited about.)

Hearst was "aroused" by such Westian lines in *Klondike Annie* as, "Give a man a free hand and he'll try to put it all over you," and, "Between two evils,

I always pick the one I never tried before." "W.R." also found offense at one of Mae's songs in the movie, *It's Better To Give Than To Receive*—parodying a revival-meeting hymn, and issued a dictate to all his newspaper editors banning any ads for the film.

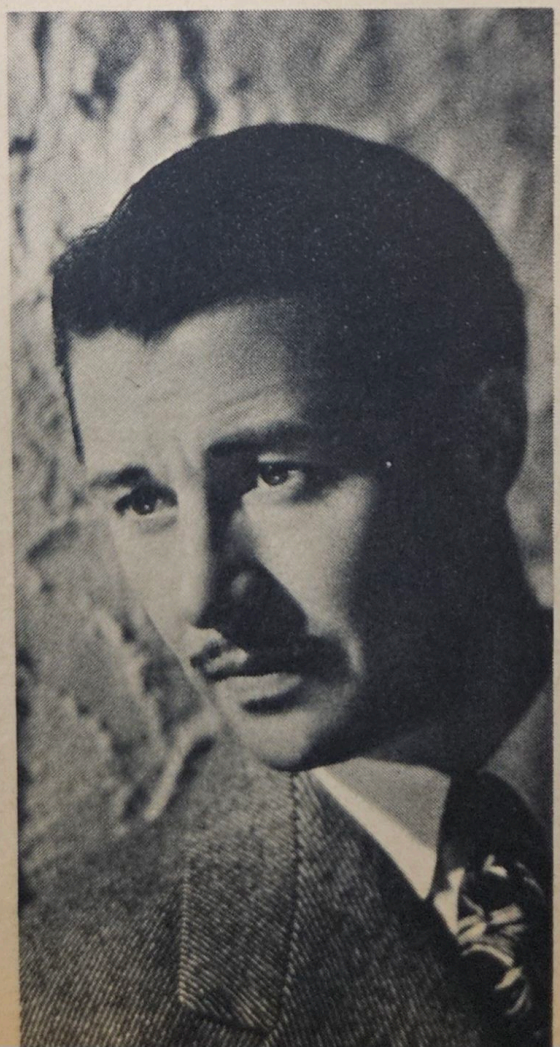
Whatever the "monster of lubricity" was up to on the screen, neither Hearst nor anyone else could find any bone to pick with Mae's off-screen behavior. She avoided the Hollywood social whirl like the plague, was never known to attend a "wild party" and was only seen in public at prizefights or fashionable restaurants escorted by her manager and old-time beau, Jim Timony. Mae is on record for saying: "Men are my kind of people. I was once asked what ten men I'd like to have come up and see me sometime. Why ten? Why not a hundred, a thousand?" While Mae has never been known to lack male company, and has always shown a marked preference for boxers and body-builders to actors

(Above) Mae, James Timony at prize fight in Hollywood. (Right) Mae was a fancier of brawny prizefighter flesh.

and playboys, she has always been *most* careful to draw the shades.

Hearst's anti-Westian campaign paid off to the extent of continuous harassment by the Hays Office, which reached a peak during the filming of her 1937 movie, *Every Day's A Holiday*. Mae was forced to delete such choice quips as, "I wouldn't even let men touch me with a ten-foot pole," and, "I wouldn't even lift my veil for that guy."

Another howl went up that year when Mae West made a guest appearance on the Chase & Sanborn radio program, over NBC. Mae delivered her own version of what went on in the Garden of Eden, with Don Ameche as Adam, Charlie McCarthy (Edgar Bergen) as the Snake, and herself as Eve. While the country as a whole chuckled at the skit, do-gooders ranging from the old biddies of the Daughters of the American Revolution to Baptist clergymen shrieked protests at Mae's delivery of a fairly innocuous line to Adam-Ameche: "Would you, honey, like to try



Don Ameche (left) cracked up at Mae's quip on NBC Chase & Sanborn radio show with Edgar Bergen, Charlie (Above).

Katharine Hepburn: "Undesirable?"

Fred Astaire: He too?

this apple sometime?"

Hearst used the opportunity for another of his Mae-raking editorials, "Mae West Pollutes Homes" and no sponsors would risk further Westian versions of the Garden of Eden or anything else. Hearst then joined forces behind the scenes with Joe Breen and connived with Harry Brandt to publish in Martin Quigley's trade journal, *Motion Picture Herald,* a bogus list of Hollywood stars whom exhibitors allegedly considered to be "Box-Office Poison." This Machiavellian move was designed by the Hays-Breen-Hearst Hierarchy to oust certain stars who for one reason or another—largely based on gossip or on the caprice of the censors — were considered "undesirable." The list included Marlene Dietrich, Katherine Hepburn, Fred Astaire, Mae West and a number of others. In Mae's case, the upshot was that Paramount found their property too hot to handle, and her contract with that studio was not renewed,

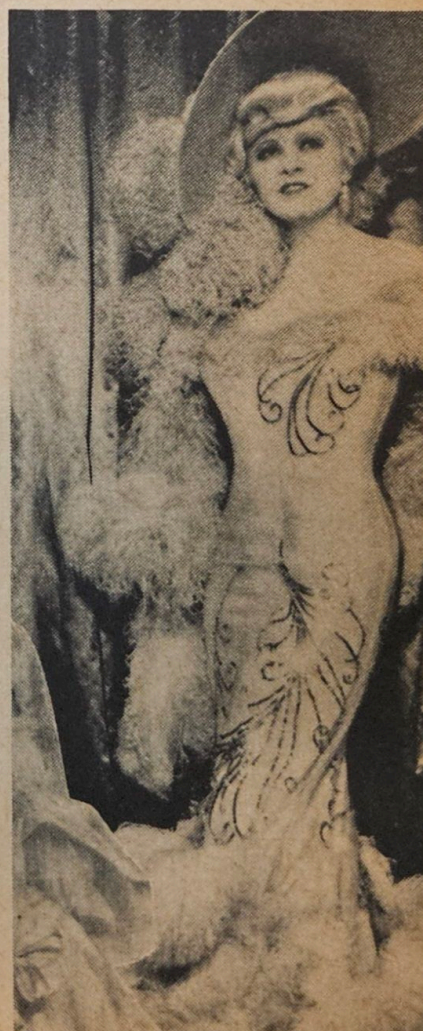
when it expired in 1938 after the completion of the bedeviled *Every Day's A Holiday.*

The decline of La West as a top star dates from that moment, and in later years she returned to the stage and night-club appearances. In 1953 she opened at the Sands Hotel in Las Vegas in the company of eight "athaleets"—hand-picked muscle men who were her near-naked chorus line for such songs as *I Like To Do All Day What I Do All Night.* One of the biceps-and-basket boys she discovered for this act was Mickey Hargitay, whom she later passed on to Jayne Mansfield.

Retired today in a beachside villa in Santa Monica, Mae still has a muscular boyfriend, Paul Novak, to keep her company, and looks serene in her seventies. Today as always, the one-and-only Mae West could say: "It's not the men in my life that counts—it's the life in my men."

Jayne Mansfield, muscleman Mickey Hargitay.

Mae West



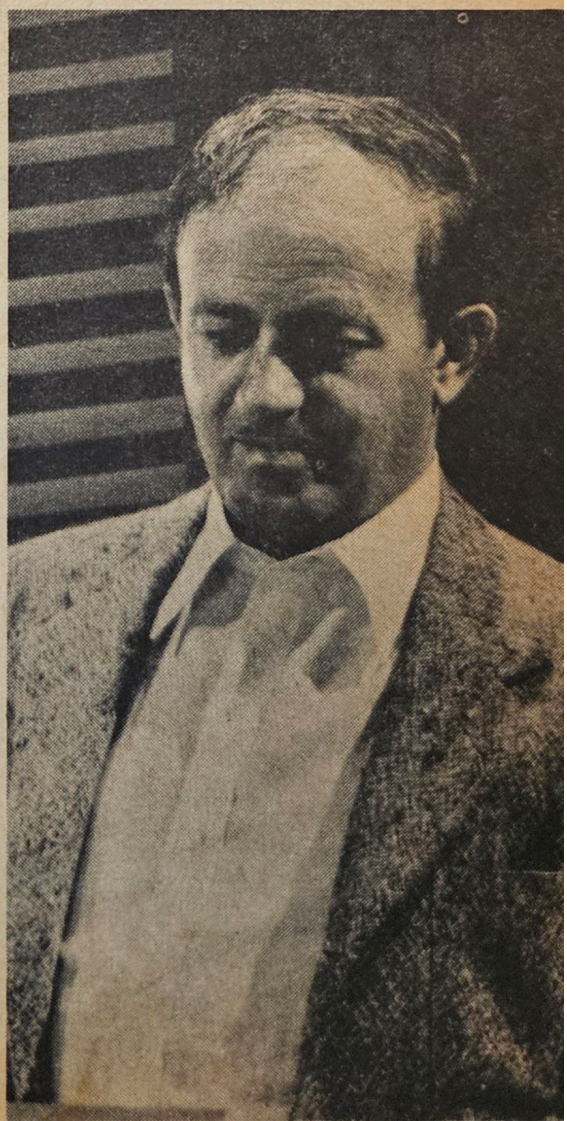
While Hearst was fuming in his editorials over the menace of Mae West to American morality, the very same papers often had their front pages covered with the most lurid of sex crimes — the favored headline lure being a young, pretty girl raped and murdered. (Hearst's formula for selling papers was by no means exclusive; it was equally exploited to advantage by Paul Block, Captain Patterson and Bernarr McFadden.)

During the Depression Years Hollywood supplied a regular contribution of headline fodder in the rape-murder department, obscure beauties done in with grisly invention, that the papers dubbed "starlets".

Rumor attributed some of these drastic demises to the door of Hollywood's own approximation of the Marquis de Sade, Harry Cohn, who was wont to beat on his huge desk with his ever-present riding crop and scream about "ungrateful actresses."

The bad-tempered boss of Columbia was reported to have a string of attractive young-hopefuls that he led on with the promise of a "starlet contract" as the first step up the ladder to the heights of a Rita Hayworth. They did, however, have to pass through a Cohn-directed "hell week" to obtain consideration. The initiations reportedly dreamed up by Cohn involved both physical and verbal humiliations — Cohn was such a past master at the coarse art of tongue-lashing that Ben Hecht labeled him "White Fang." Towards the conclusion of the initiatory week the distressed damsel, so the reports went, would be offered a small-carat diamond for her pains — *if* she could retrieve it with her pearly teeth from a very, very unusual spot. (The kiss-off was that the hapless hopeful invariably discovered she had been doubly had: the diamond was as phony as the promise of a Columbia contract.)

Rita Hayworth (left); bad-tempered Harry Cohn (bottom left); and Ben Hecht (below), who dubbed the film tyrant "White Fang."

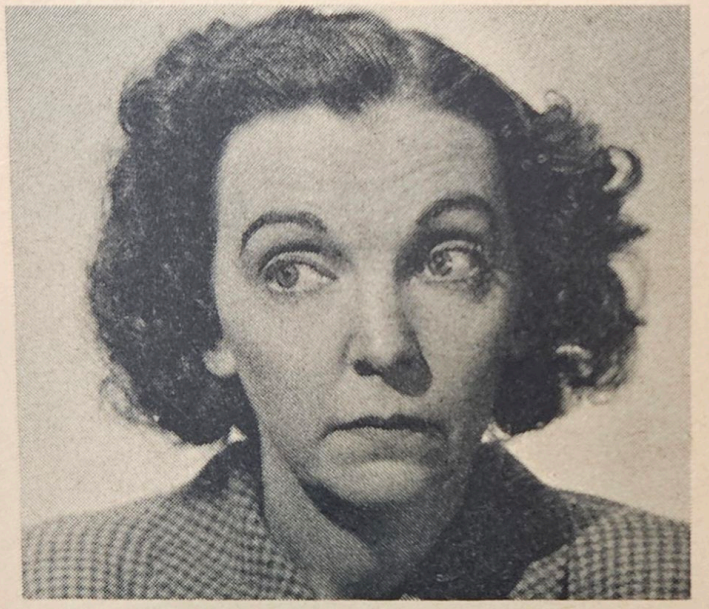


It was claimed that bald, beefy Cohn would occasionally have one of these playmates "taken for a ride" if her continued presence proved inconvenient. There was never any substantiation to these whispers — but a number of defunct lovelies *were* found tossed from a car in Malibu; floating in the lake at Echo Park; flung over the fence among the decaying standing sets on the M-G-M backlot (a "present" from one studio chief to another?).

In the middle of the Thirties there occurred one murder in Hollywood that had "star quality" — that of Thelma Todd, the girl who was known as the "Ice Cream Blonde." Hearst, Block, Patterson and McFadden all gave the crime capital treatment in their papers in the good old tabloid tradition of the Twenties.

Thelma Todd was a blonde comedienne who had achieved great popularity in a series of zany films, ranging from a foil of the Marx Brothers in some of their burlesques to the partner of ZaSu Pitts in a series of farces for Hal Roach.

"Ice Cream Blonde" Thelma Todd, star-quality murder.



Thelma worked with Marx Brothers (above, with Groucho), with ZaSu Pitts (left) and in series of farces for Hal Roach (below).

Director Roland West, Thelma's lover, questioned.

In 1935 — December 16th — Thelma was found dead, seated in her cabriolet sports car, which was parked in the garage of the home she shared with director Roland West, near Malibu.

Thelma, in death, was dressed to the hilt, and was wearing her famous matched-pearl necklace on which she had squandered a small fortune. Some odd details were immediately apparent; among others, when her body was discovered her clothing was disarranged in such a way as to suggest a struggle had taken place.

The inquest which followed resulted in a strange verdict: *"Death due to carbon monoxide asphyxiation."* Under the circumstances, it was about as satisfactory as the death of Ince *"from acute indigestion."* But, as in the William Desmond Taylor case, studio forces intervened to stifle the scandal. California justice, once again, revealed a cer-

Was Thelma victim of the perfect crime?

tain willingness to overlook certain facts when the palm was crossed with silver.

Aside from the disarrayed state of Thelma's garments, there were other details which did not jibe at all with the official verdict: if she had died from asphyxiation, how could the blood which was on her lips be accounted for?

If she had died Saturday night, as the police affirmed, what of the witnesses who claimed to have seen Thelma Sunday, tearing about in her flashy sportscar — a dark, handsome, unknown man at her side?

Roland West — who had directed Lon Chaney in *The Monster*, among other films — of course had some explaining to do, since Thelma had been found shut up in his garage. It was no one's secret in the film colony that Thelma Todd was Roland West's mistress of the moment.

After a lengthy interrogation by the Santa Monica fuzz, West ended up by admitting that he and Thelma had a violent quarrel in his home earlier that evening — that he had cut short by tossing the "Ice Cream Blonde" out the front door.

Thereafter, Thelma had beat on the door with her fists and hammered it with kicks for ten minutes, all the while screaming obscenities directed at West at the top of her lungs. (This last detail was confirmed by the neighbors, who recognized Thelma's famous voice which had shrilled its way through many a Hal Roach comedy.)

An examination of Roland West's Spanish-paneled front door also revealed unmistakable traces of fresh kick marks — confirming his story that Thelma had been storming outside — while he had been inside.

Other friends of Thelma were questioned. It was learned that her close friend and screen partner, ZaSu Pitts, had loaned Thelma many thousands of dollars over the years, to help her through some tight spots, and that the blonde scatter-brain had never seemed in a hurry to make repayment. Thel-

ma had dropped a considerable amount of money in her pet project, a supper club on the Coast Highway near Santa Monica named *Thelma Todd's Roadside Rest*. Thelma was having a tough time making a go of it during the Depression Years, and her business head was mostly "missing."

Thelma's attorney attempted to open a second inquest — to prove his thesis that the blonde star had been "rubbed out" by paid killers of a notorious Sicilian gangster, who was taking over the gambling racket in California, and had decided the upper floors of *Thelma Todd's Roadside Rest* were a perfect setting for the installation of tricky roulette wheels and dubious gaming tables — with a guaranteed stream of well-heeled suckers from Thelma's Hollywood contacts.

The attorney contended that when Thelma had nixed a deal with the Chiz, she had signed her death-warrant. The attorney's appeal for a further investigation was itself nixed by the authorities — with more than a nod from Hal Roach.

Another theory that was a subject of Hollywood gossip was that Roland West — assisted by a look-alike stand-in for Thelma, who staged the kicking, screaming scene on West's doorstep — had in reality knocked Thelma out (the blood on her lips), dumped her in the car in the closed garage and turned on the ignition. According to this gissop, West had rid himself of a mistress who had become bugging, and had committed *"the perfect crime."*

Thelma Todd lay in an open casket, blanketed in yellow rose-buds, at her crowded Forest Lawn funeral. An actress friend remarked that she looked as if "she might just sit up and speak." But Thelma carried her secret into her marble crypt, and her murder remains one of Hollywood's most impenetrable enigmas.

Just as an occasional sex-murder rendered some would-be starlet "front-page-famous" for the space of one edition, sometimes a suicide would allow some obscure Hollywoodian those longed-for headlines for a brief flash of posthumous fame.

In the grim, grinding years of the Depression, when even the once-famous of the silents had their sleeping potion or gaspipe exits perfunctorily recorded in the papers, it took some sob-sister angle or novel touch in technique of self-destruction to make the blase editors sit up and take notice.

The suicides in the ranks of the starlets were of two distinct categories. One was the "bid" that had the cards stacked so there was little likelihood of a fatal issue—these were the ill-famed "publicity stunt" suicide attempts which desperate climbers have resorted to in hope of achieving *some* form of public notoriety—a last gamble. (Sleeping pills, preceeded by a *"Goodbye cruel Hollywood"* phone call were a favored method—but sometimes the "last-minute rescue" *did not come off* and the starlet slept on—*into oblivion.*)

The other order of suicide was another manner entirely—the starlet was grimly earnest and determined to succeed, at least, in this one last melodramatic gesture. The measure of bitterness and heartbreak felt by these former beauty contest winners, screen-test winners, and would-be screen luminaries was revealed in the plains they took that the bizarre trappings or circumstances of their murder scene played with themselves should not escape the eye of the film colony that had found no use for them, and that their name — *just once* — should blaze forth from the fourth estate.

Thus it was that a lovely young brunette named Arletta Duncan planned to quit the scene in the grand manner, in the middle Thirties. Arletta's tale was typical of many others. In a "Girl From Every

State Talent Contest" trumped up by Universal Studios, Arletta, who had achieved local renown as Harvest Queen in her home town of Belle Plaine, was brought to Hollywood as Miss Iowa.

Winning by the same roulette that had brought Clara Bow to Hollywood, Arletta arrived in 1930 to a welcoming committee of Universal stars. Her screen and voice tests were deemed promising enough—she had a good body and a pretty face that Hollywood could gimmick up any way it chose. She was signed to a starlet contract, and enmeshed in the Universal machine known as "The Treatment." This meant studio flacks got her picture and mention in the fan magazines; a series of walk-on bits with a line or two in Universal films; gossip-column mention through plants about a studio-manufactured romance with featured-player Tom Brown, with whom she was seen wining, dining, and dancing.

Arletta began to receive fan mail; she did well enough in another small part to be considered for a featured role in James Whale's *The Bride of Frankenstein.* She was tested; publicity shots were taken picnicking with Boris Karloff—*somebody else got the part.* Arletta had been in Hollywood five years and—from her viewpoint—had gotten exactly nowhere. She couldn't go back to Belle Plaine. Her Hollywood caper had met with strong disapproval from her family. She'd never live it down.

When Arletta Duncan decided to bow out, she loaded every vestige of her Hollywood career in her roadster, and drove out Sunset Boulevard to Santa Monica canyon, where she parked near a deserted field. She unloaded the messy accumulation of five years' memorabilia in the Film Mecca and carried it armload by armload to the center of the field. There she made a pyre—feeding to

the flames her original Universal contract, clippings of herself as Harvest Queen and Miss Iowa, a souvenir program from the *Cocoanut Grove* signed, "To Arletta—In Memory of a Swell Evening—Tom Brown." Also into the fire went bundles of fan mail which included offers of marriage from Alaska and Singapore; shooting-scripts with her few scenes underscored in red; stacks of standardized, posed, publicity photographs. (Enough ill-consumed remnants were discovered later to identify the violator of the Santa Monica public trash-burning ordinance—but Arletta was beyond reprimand at that time.)

As the afternoon declined, Arletta drove back into Hollywood for the last time, this time parking her car in the Hollywood hills, at the base of that steep hillside which bore thirteen gigantic, lethal letters: each the size of a house, they spelled out

HOLLYWOODLAND,

constructed of metal scaffolding faced with sheet-

Tom Brown

iron. (The fancy nomenclature and its' cumbersome erection on the hillside was the doing of Mack Sennett, who sunk much capital in a real-estate scheme in the late Twenties to promote the hillside area for fashionable Spanish villa homesites. The Crash made quick work of the grandiose project and left Sennett without either property or bank account.)

Arriving beneath the spelled-out taunt of the realm she could not conquer, Arletta stripped off her skirt and blouse to uncover a brief little two-piece outfit that had shown her advantages fetchingly in publicity photos.

It was as if all the publicity photographers in Hollywood were amassed below as Arletta deftly climbed up the scaffolding supporting the towering **"H."** On the summit—in the orange rays of the setting sun, Arletta then performed an act never witnessed by the Universal publicity department: she peeled off her skimpy bra, flung it to imaginary fans below, and the scanty panties followed.

Nude, facing the city which refused her a crown, Arletta flung herself into thin air.

That should have been a merciful conclusion to her gesture. But no: Arletta's leap into space landed her square in a clump of prickly-pear cactus. When the reporters turned up the next day to check out her letters—opened that morning—telling them where to go to find "a broken body hiding a broken heart," they found instead a still-living though battered Arletta, whose delirious thrashings, all night long in the cactus clump, had turned her into a livid human pin-cushion.

Arletta's agony lasted four days, during which a team of interns extracted thousands of spines from her graceful, dying body. *Qualis artifex pereo!*

Around 1930 there appeared in the United States a pharmaceutical product which immediately became immensely popular, a sleeping pill called *Seconal*. About ten pills were enough for a painless slumber that would last forever. There were hundreds of *Seconal suicides* in Hollywood, where it was assured — for special reasons! — that the product would be well received. Starving extras, victims of blackmailers, fucked and forgotten little *hopefuls* — but also many, many celebrities!

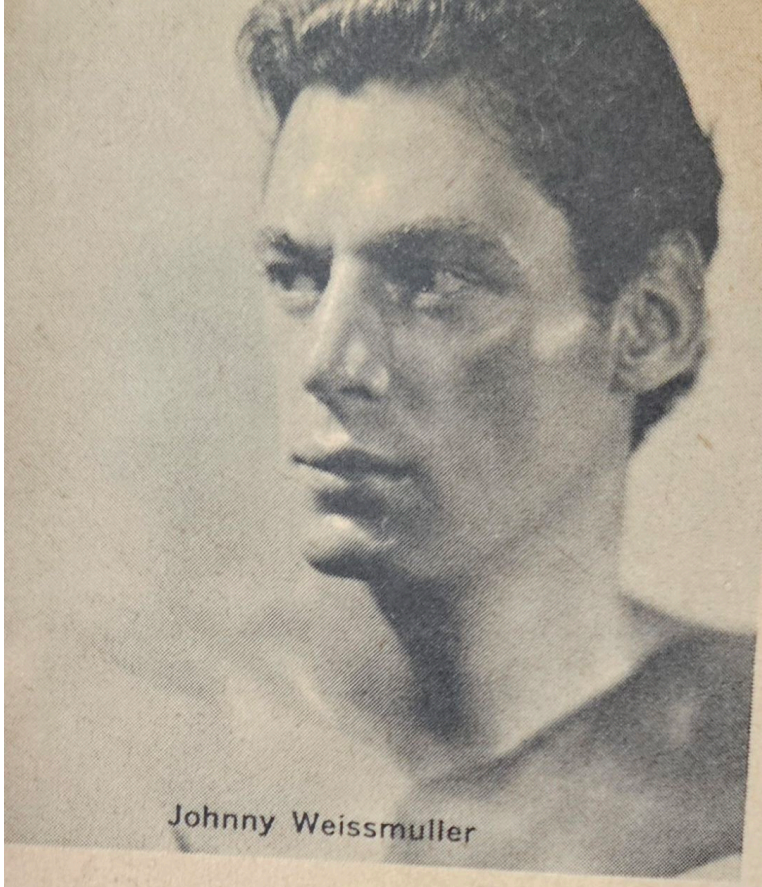
Among these candidates for death were, first of all, the drug-ridden star Jeanne Eagels, 1929; Milton Sills, 1930; the young leading man Robert Ames, 1931; dope-addicted Alma Rubens, 1931; the comic, Karl Dane, 1932; silent star Marie Prevost, 1934; director George Hill, 1934; fallen star John Gilbert, 1935; the star of *The Crowd,* James Murray, 1937; the young Warner Brothers leading man, Ross Alexander, 1937; the director Tom Forman, 1938. A *second* wave carried off female impersonator Julian Eltinge, 1941; comedian Joe Jackson, 1942; the comedienne Lupe Velez, 1944; the character actor Laird Cregar, 1945; Hal Roach star Carole Landis, 1948; Hitchcock's actor Robert Walker, 1951, and the Madame Gin Sling of Sternberg, Ona Munson, 1956.

The most recent spectacular attempts have been those of Susan Hayward, saved by having her stomach pumped out, as well as Diana Barrymore in 1955; Martha Raye and Judy Garland in the following year, and in 1957 Montgomery Clift and Marie MacDonald, — known as *The Body* — a starlet suffering from constant bad publicity following her famous bungled "kidnaping attempt."

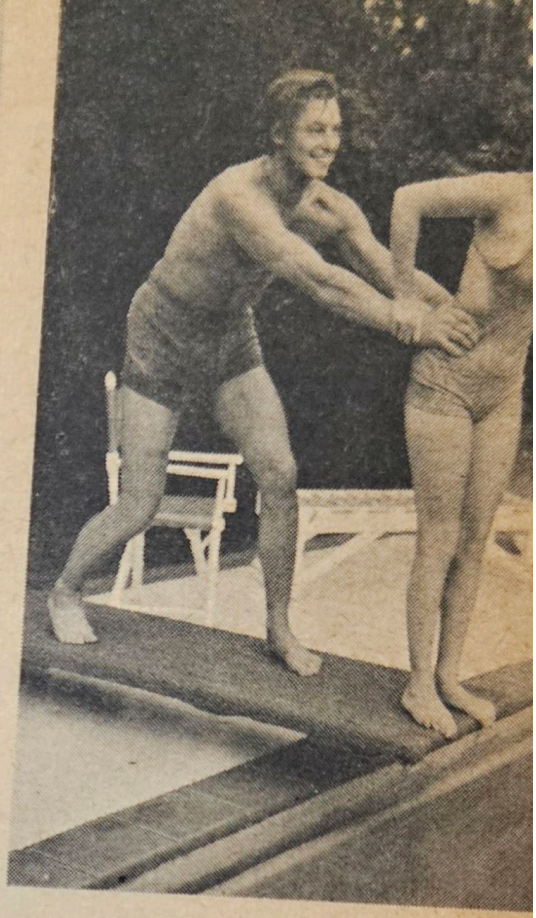
The palm for *perseverance* in this department should go to Judy Garland, who was dropped by M-G-M and who has tried on *several* occasions to end it all by *Seconal,* by gas, or with a razor, in be-

Lupe Velez

Gary Cooper in 1929 Western, **Wolf Song,** with Lupe Velez.



Johnny Weissmuller



tween stays at various withdrawal sanitariums.

The friend and assistant of Murnau, Herman Bing, put an end to his life by means of a pistol shot in 1947, as had Paul Bern in 1932 and Robert Harron, Griffith's ex-protege, in 1920.

Also in 1935, the ex-star of silent pictures, Lou Tellegen, staged the most *revolting* of all Hollywood suicides; surrounded by posters of his successes and his most beautiful stills, he ripped open his chest with scissors, just like Max Linder, ten years before..

"There's no come-back for a *HAS BEEN.*"

The suicide of Lupe Velez is possibly the most revealing and the one giving the deepest insight. Her hot temperament at all times has earned this comedienne, introduced by Douglas Fairbanks in *The Gaucho,* Leon Errol's leading lady in Hal Roach Comedies, the surname of "The Mexican Bombshell." Famous for her stormy love affairs, Lupe, upon being deserted by Gary Cooper, got hold of young Johnny Weissmuller — hero of the Olympic Games and the fastest swimmer in the world — who had been called to Hollywood to play *Tarzan.* The marks of their violent physical encounters left marks on Tarzan's Olympian torso which created a problem for the makeup man, who had to camouflage scratches, bruises and bites — not *all* of them, of course, only the ones which would show on film! It should be added that Johnny took spectacular revenge one night at Ciro's, the most exclusive nightclub on Sunset Boulevard, by throwing a table — and everything on it! — at the head of this ravening *she-wolf.*

When Lupe no longer saw a way out of her troubles — after so many quarrels and stories — she decided to kill herself, and determined to turn it into one of the most beautiful moments of her life; to turn tragedy into *apotheosis.*

She ordered hundreds of flower arrangements,

and when her house had been turned into a greenhouse of the very loveliest ones, she called in her make-up man and her hairdresser to turn her out more magnificently than ever before for this last time. Then, in the huge Spanish-style house, she put on a lame dress and lots of jewelry. After a solitary banquet, during which she had herself served with the spiced dishes of her native country, she dismissed the servants and went upstairs to her room. Alone among the flowers, she swallowed a *tubeful* of *Seconal* and lay down on her bed.

Half an hour later, the meticulous staging suddenly took an unforseen turn which would have been worthy of Bunuel. All the effects planned by the fiery Mexican had been ordered; the flowers paid her a final homage, the glistening chandeliers shone on the lame of her dress. Lupe died in *beauty*.

The harmony was complete, with the sole exception of the *Seconal* and the spicy food, when the solemn lights around her body were abruptly bespattered. Lupe obeyed an instinct even stronger than death and ran, teetering on her high heels, toward the bathroom. But she slipped on the marble tiles as she ran up to the toilet bowl — which turned out to be her last mirror! — and head first, she fell in and broke her neck. Thus she was found, stuck and half-submerged in this *bowl*, strange and macabre. And thus was extinguished one of Hollywood's glories!

It was to this same desire for a *resplendent* end that Paul Bern succumbed, the "Grey Eminence" of MGM, when he arranged the details of his own suicide in 1932, after two months of tortured married life with Jean Harlow, the "Platinum Blonde," the sexiest star in Hollywood. Paul Bern had already tried to put an end to himself at the death of his first love, the dusky Barbara La Marr, whose sixth husband he had hoped to become. With blonde

Jean Harlow and Paul Bern: A tragic match.

Jean Harlow, he succeeded.

He was discovered in Jean's ruffly pink boudoir, a bullet through his head; his nude body drenched with Mitsouko, his wife's favorite perfume — like that of a victim immolated in front of the altar — lay in front of her dressing table. On top of the table lay the following note: *"Dearest dear, unfortunately this is the only way to make good the frightful wrong I have done you, and to wipe out my abject humiliation. I love you, Paul. P.S. You understand that last night was only a comedy."*

Apparently Bern, a man with underdeveloped genitalia, had been unable to satisfy the woman who was reputed to be Hollywood's most *exotic* flower. (It should be noted that Jean Harlow had divorced

her first husband for cruelty — he *read* in the marital bed!) Jean Harlow had just completed, opposite Clark Gable, the most successful picture of her career, *Red Dust*. It was directed by veteran Victor Fleming and it was the hottest picture ever to be made in Hollywood. (The very respectable Hays Office must have been temporarily asleep.) *Red Dust*, already hot, had exceptional success in "specialty" houses in Latin American countries where the version was cunningly enriched with pure *pornography* — details of bodies entwined in ecstasy, expertly filmed, including the bodies of Clark and Jean, with even some platinum-blonde *pubic hair!* (I had occasion to see a print of this version at the *Teatro Shanghai*, a *very special* movie house *para hombres solo of La Havana*, under the "liberal" regime of Batista.) And so the "Platinum Blonde" became a star of "fuck" pictures, through no fault of her own!

Red Dust was the first of a series of successes which turned Jean Harlow into the most valuable young star of her time: *Blonde Bombshell, Dinner at Eight, China Seas* and *Libeled Lady*. She had a much-discussed romance with William Powell, one of her leading men, which Louella Parsons used to report on in very dramatic fashion. The unforeseen and brutal end of her affair with Powell, formerly married to the impish Carole Lombard, came with her death in June 1937, at the age of twenty-six in a Los Angeles hospital from an infection. During the funeral, attended by all of Hollywood, the crowd of hysterical fans threw themselves on the funeral wreaths, souvenir hunters fighting for scraps. Three of her most loyal admirers decided to follow her into the beyond in the course of following days, as in the happy days of Valentino.

I remember an MGM short entitled *Our Jean Harlow*, paying homage to the memory of the star.

Jean Harlow: Romance with William Powell.

The last frame shows Jean's face, surrounded by a halo of silver hair, set like a jewel in the middle of a sparkling star. The living star smiles — a nostalgic smile. A man's voice whispers: "Good-bye, Jean" and the choir and orchestra mount to a crescendo of apotheosis. The star and its burden begin to draw away and slowly rise upwards through the night, into a darkness *pricked* by stars. While the faithful sobbed in the theatre, the star joined the company of the other celestial bodies.

Then across the troubled skies of Hollywood there passed one single star which could not be obscured by any passing cloud: *The Divine Garbo.*

She obviously never said those famous *historical* words: "I want to be alone", but she did most emphatically say: "I want to be left alone!"

It is easy to understand her, *The Divine One,* in this hysterical mythology of *Hollywood-Babylon.* Mistrusting all those smart cocktail parties, dinners and night clubs, she avoided the reporters as if they had been poison. She is even said to have run away from them, thanks to her strong Swedish legs, on a Beverly Hills golf course where a pack of reporters had pursued her. Isn't she the *living* symbol of Anti-Scandal?

If you like. For scandal *slung* to her, trailed her, all through her Hollywood adventure. Thus, throughout her famous "romance" with John Gilbert, scandal was lying in wait for them: Wasn't Gilbert married, and thus off the market? The admirers of Garbo did not care, but the famous "women's clubs", considering the example, thus set *too* flagrantly, set out to flood MGM with letters.

Louis B. Mayer considered it wise to settle the matter by means of another publicity "trick". The country was aroused by announcing to the press: *GARBO KIDNAPPED!* The star actually had disappeared, and during two days the *worst* was feared, with the police mobilized all over the United States. On the third day, this Chimera, this Sphinx of Hollywood, was "discovered" calmly *sunbathing* in a quiet Arizona desert resort accompanied by the director of her last picture. And the publicity department of MGM lost no time in naming the wealthy bachelor Clarence Brown as *The Divine One's* new romantic interest.

If it had really been necessary to split hairs in order to manufacture some "scandal" around Garbo,

Garbo had many screen lovers.

it must be admitted that slanderers were not lacking in the Hollywood hothouse. It was rumored that Garbo had been *sexually derailed* by the Swedish director, Maurice Stiller, who discovered her and brought her to Hollywood, and who forced her to take part — as *spectator* — in his frolics with his boy friend (hence her distaste for men.)

But since *The Divine* carefully hid her private

life in Hollywood behind the high, electrified fences of her Renaissance house, and treated co-workers, yes-men and even Louis B. Mayer himself with the same glacial indifference, they all finally ended up not at her feet, but rather *on* her feet, which were poked fun at because of their size.

Garbo, like Harlow, was to become the "star" of pornographic pictures. That was in the "secret" version of *Camille,* which is rumored to have been made *under cover* in the studios of MGM itself. When the existence of this version became known, it having been shown in all the "specialized" theatres of Latin America, Louis B. Mayer immediately fired a number of assistants, as well as a hapless double of Garbo who turned out to be the scapegoat.

The mystery of *The Divine* remains, maintained as carefully nowadays behind dark glasses in exile as it was behind the Renaissance walls. Let us no longer try to guess the "secret" (scandalous or not) of the Sphinx of Hollywood: A sphinx without a secret, a woman without a story to indicate if there ever was one. *Requiescat in pace!*

The tone of Hollywood scandals changed when, in 1943, a new star of Warner Brothers, Errol Flynn, who was very popular with young Americans, was accused by the State of California of having had what Brantomę calls *"fricatelles"* with two girls under eighteen, Peggy Satterle and Betty Hansen, *ardent* members of the Errol Flynn Fan Club, whom he had invited on a cruise on his big yacht of racy repute. Flynn was hailed into Court for *"debauching minors"*.

The stakes were high: According to California Law, the accused could be condemned to a long prison term. You don't trifle with *San Quentin Quail* in Puritan countries, in spite of Hollywood's plenitude of eager little Lolitas.

It goes without saying that the papers devoted

entire columns to this affair which, for weeks, occupied "Page One". But as the testimonies were given, it became clear that the two little rascals had been *more* than *agreeable,* and seemed to have well passed "their majority in vice" (as Mr. Le Troquet puts it). Letters were discovered in which they boasted of their achievement to their little friends, dwelling on every detail of Mr. Flynn's bedroom (or cabin) manners.

The District Attorney had a hard time proving "rape" during the famous educational cruise. This correspondence, cleverly put in its proper light by the "Attorney of the Stars", Jerry Geisler, saved Errol Flynn. His next picture, *Gentleman Jim,* was a resounding success which was immensely profitable for Warners. In the game of *Russian Roulette,* which is scandal, Flynn had won.

Errol Flynn: He made seagoing sex popular.

A little while later, Chaplin was in the news again because of the shabby and ridiculous "paternity case" complaint of Joan Barry. The Hearst papers slavered against Chaplin, the King of the corrupt press taking this opportunity to give way to a 20-year-old hatred. During the following months, the details of the trial and the tearful testimony of Joan Barry filled numerous special editions, and the public, prey to the emotions of the decisive period of the war, looked with a jaundiced eye upon these "revelations" on the private life of the "dissolute billionaire" as the press painted him.

No matter that the defense was able to prove in the course of these months, Joan Barry had had *intimate* relations with many men, which made it hard to believe that she had been "seduced" just by Chaplin. And no more was made of blood analyses which proved that it was *impossible* for Chaplin to have fathered the child. The verdict was a stunning example of disregard of evidence on the part of a Court which had pre-judged the case: Chaplin was condemned to make monthly payments to the child for the rest of his life, and to give her his name.

All through the trial, Chaplin had remained impassive, but the small number of his close friends knew how badly he had been hurt. In Hollywood, many of his old associates refused to speak to him. The political accusations which were levied against him a little later found fertile soil in the hostility created against him in the public at large. His "moral turpitude" counted as much as his political convictions in the condemnation pronounced against him in Congress by a senator, at the time of his flight to Europe.

The time had come for him to end his forty-two year stay; life in America had become unbearable.

All that remained was for Hollywood to cry "shame" on its most famous artist, pushing igno-

miny to the point where he was denied the right to a bronze star among those of the "greatest stars of all time" which should have been inserted in the pavement of the Hollywood Boulevard sidewalk. But he can very well do without the homage of this *sordid* little thoroughfare.

The depressing political scandals of Hollywood, which Mr. McCarthy tried to bring into being, did not actually concern the stars; with the exception of those like Montgomery and Menjou, who out of "patriotism" chose to denounce their comrades. The fate of the *blackballed* artists left the public unmoved, which found other and spicier scandals more to their liking: the star Frances Farmer, spectacular victim of mental illness; Robert Mitchum, apprehended by the vice squad for smoking marijuana cigarettes; or the Walter Wanger affair, when the producer — in a not-very-gentlemanly fashion — shot Jennings Lang, the frequent companion of his wife, Joan Bennett, through the groin.

Other scandals caused plenty of commotion behind the scenes, for instance the historical episodes enacted at two of Hollywood's plushiest night clubs. One night at Earl Carroll's, John Barrymore, drunker than usual, used the sumptuous crimson curtains for a urinal in front of all of Hollywood. Some time before, in Ciro's, Paulette Goddard created a certain stir by her alleged unorthodox behavior with her handsome escort.

Other hidden scandals had macabre overtones; such as Mary Pickford's legendary "face lifting". Planning to return to the screen after a twenty-year absence, Mary purchased a screen play which seemed to suit her. Nevertheless she decided, before braving the spotlights, her face deserved an *asthetic overhaul.* Prior to having this operation, Mary had

reportedly forced her old housekeeper, a plain woman her own age, — and in her service for thirty years — to submit to surgery in order to find out if the surgeon could succeed. With the housekeeper, the results were "remarkable" — she seemed to be a flashy fifty instead of a sexless sixty — but with Mary you couldn't say the same. Perhaps it was the hand of God that caused the surgeon to slip. The comeback project was abandoned. Whatever the forces of fate, the second coming of Pickford never materialized.

It was also said of the "World's little Girl Friend" that she was very fond of the bottle, with *exceptional* powers of absorption—even for this town, where drinks and cocktails are the preferred means of combating boredom. For the last thirty years, Mary must have been prodigiously bored in her home on the heights of the famous Pickfair, if her liquor orders are any indication.

Alcoholic legend also does not forget that other past glory, Marion Davies, to whom a consumption as great as that of John Barrymore is ascribed. Hearst pretended to be unaware of his mistress' failing, while seeing to it that the servants of San Simeon never gave her anything to drink; it was Marion's *loyal friends* who smuggled in her ration of Scotch and gin.

After her *retirement* from the screen (about 1937) Marion emptied whiskey bottles in order to fill her hours while in her Santa Monica or San Simeon castles. Drink, and children's games, such as puzzles which she worked on for days at a time, helped pass the nights when Hearst didn't appear.

When Hearst lay dying in his home in Beverly Hills in 1951, Marion was at his bedside day and night much to the great indignation of Mrs. Millicent Hearst and her sons who had never been able to stand "that woman". But when Hearst died,

Marion, at his side, had fallen into a deep and alcoholic sleep. Imagine her surprise, upon waking, to find his bed *empty!* The sons, who were also watching by the bedside, saw him take his last breath, then they proceeded to remove the mortal shell, not considering it necessary to notify Marion, his companion for thirty years, whom they cursed out behind her back.

But Marion, never lovelier, had her revenge when the will was read. "Pops" hadn't forgotten her.

Studios received the biggest shock since the time when a radioactive cloud passing across the Hollywood sky—from the atomic proving grounds of Nevada—all at once blacked out *all* the film in process of development, causing the studios a total loss of a million dollars. (Since that disaster, the California laboratories have taken the precaution of covering their roofs with a layer of lead.)

Around this time, the big call-girl *scandal* exploded in Hollywood.

The *Atomic Bomb* of the Call Girls was a little black book belonging to the most enterprising and prosperous madam in Hollywood. This lady had noted the names, telephone numbers, and "needs" of *clients* for whom she furnished young and ravishing pin-up girls who pinned down an average of $100 pin money for each assignment. The police had carried out a raid on a moorish-style manor, *peacefully* nestled in the Hollywood Hills, and there had apprehended the owner, a number of girls, and the famous little *black book,* a veritable "golden book" of Hollywood, according to the agents. The police threatened to publish the list and to summon the persons involved before a Court of Law, but the studios applied pressure and succeeded in hushing the matter up. There were *many artists* of a certain age who—after having suddenly taken off

for the four posters of the world for "a vacation", —quietly returned to Hollywood.

Hollywood also has, no doubt, Call-Boys—pin up boys who are complaisant and available, but that is another story which has not (as yet) led to scandal. And some even have come up in the world and have become stars.

The movie capital had not yet entirely recovered from the Call Girl Affair when a little magazine appeared on the newsstands. This new offspring of yellow journalism soon became the talk of the town, and CONFIDENTIAL acquired the reputation of the worst kind of rag—but of course everybody read it avidly anyway.

The motto of this magazine, published in New York since 1952, was "All the truth, all the names", inscribed below its title. The "names" were the entire American Who's Who, the "truth" was *supposed* revelations regarding their private lives. That was nothing revolutionary for America, which has never lacked professional gossip-mongers — from the malicious Walter Winchell to the vicious Westbrook Pegler, and the terrifying tart, Elsa Maxwell—and those specialists of "insinuendo", Louella Parsons and Hedda Hopper. But CONFIDENTIAL, perfidious and slangy, carried it further than any of the rumor mongers had ever done, and did not hesitate to affirm that the adventures which it published were actually a faithful account of the facts. However that might be, these scandal sheets were wildly successful and their sales spiraled.

The editor of CONFIDENTIAL, a Russian emigrant who had taken the name of Robert Harrison, had conceived the idea for this magazine after watching a televised report on prostitution and vice. The interest of the Yankee audience in these telecasts had eclipsed all other programs, and Har-

Robert Harrison.

rison had deduced therefrom that the multitude of spectators who was so interested in such a sordid subject would not fail to be attracted by the same type of thing in a magazine, provided it was presented in a spicy manner. Thus the little emigrant abandoned the publication of a magazine for *fetishists,* or ladies posing semi-nude, perched on huge heels, or loaded down with chains by a slave trader —who happened to be Harrison himself.

And this editor, already so *specialized,* embarked on a large-scale attack on the private lives of America's most famous citizens; his formula was simple: a well-known name, an unflattering photograph and a story, on the short side, giving a sordid episode in a mocking and humorous manner. Harrison understood very well what his customers wanted: "The Americans," so he confided to his friends, "would certainly like to read about things which they are afraid to do themselves."

It is hardly surprising that with the increasing

...ten Syria Hold, Purge Army
Who Cuddled In Row 35? Confi Mystery
It could only happen in Hollywood!
...when LANA TURNER shared a lover with AVA GARDNER!
MAUREEN O'HARA Cuddled in ROW 35
LOWDOWN ON HOLLYWOOD HIGH SOCIETY!...
...Joan Crawford and the Handsome Bartender!

success of the magazine, the protagonists turned out to be more and more the stars of Hollywood, whose private lives were of morbid interest to the public. Soon CONFIDENTIAL was "the" chronicle of Hollywood lives and morals. In order to fill his files with case histories, and his pages with purple prose, Harrison founded, in the town itself, an "agency" run by his niece, Marjorie Mead, and her husband, Fred, called *Hollywood Research Incorporated.*

These researchers of a lowly specialized type, functioned as collectors of the secrets of the stars' intimate private lives. For this pleasant work, shady shamuses, stammering starlets, has-been hams and even jaded and faded journalists were engaged to rattle, prattle and tattle. The success of CONFIDENTIAL enabled Harrison to pay a high price—up to $1000 per gossip item—to assure him of a fine stable of spies.

The nerve system of this organization, however, were the very smart pin-up girls, adorning the bars of smart Sunset Strip. These high-priced floozies became the source of the most interesting information for CONFIDENTIAL. In bed, they received the confidences of the most famous stars, while a miniature tape recorder, inside their bag—left carelessly open on the bedside table—recorded by night the indiscretions devoured days later by ogle-eyed readers. It is obvious that, egged on by such daring questions, the *relaxed* actors often picked these moments of complete privacy and intimacy to recount to their prodding partners those exploits of which they were proudest . . . (A similar technique was used in order to confirm the tastes of certain Lesbian actresses.)

Hollywood Research also unearthed compromising photographs and films, making use of the latest refinements of technique: *infra-red* and *ultra-rapid*

film, high-power telephoto lenses. That was the method by which the domestic battles of Anita Ekberg and Anthony Steele could be made public, on the actress' own lawn, one beautiful summer night. This voluptuous scene was capturned in spite of the darkness, thanks to the waves of heat emanating from the entwined entertainers.

When information of a particularly compromising nature was concerned, it was customary for an agent of HOLLYWOOD RESEARCH to visit the star involved, with a copy of the story in his hand. It was then suggested to the victim that the original might be purchased. Panic-stricken, some paid in cash; others, furious, refused. But even those stars who had given in to blackmail several times in succession, when they finally balked at "coughing up" the cash, had to finally see their story in headlines: such as: THE TRIPLE COUP OF EDDIE FISHER, LIZABETH SCOTT AMONG THE GIRLS, DAN DAILEY IN SKIRTS, and THE BEST PUMPER IN HOLLYWOOD? M-M-M-MARILYN M-M-M-MONROE!!

This reign of terror lasted for four years, during which the personalities of all Hollywood trembled at each new issue, while the success and the obscenity of the magazine constantly increased. There was practically no star who escaped the "CONFIDENTIAL TREATMENT", and some were the victims of series of revelations: Marilyn, Orson, Lana, Ava, Frank, and a roving starlet, Jayne. Safely ensconced in New York, Harrison made sure that each phrase of his magazine was based on a piece of film, a photograph or registration; a brace of shyster lawyers checked each article prior to publication. But with increasing success and no prosecution, CONFIDENTIAL forgot itself so far as to embroider truth with picturesque details. And Harrison became, no doubt, one of the most hated

Dorothy Dandridge: She fired the first shot.

men in the United States after Joe McCarthy. That was not always without danger. One day, he was shot at during a hunting expedition in the Jungle of Santo Domingo; another time, Grace Kelly's father came in person to smash his New York office and take a poke at him the day after he published an article on the future Princess of Monaco. And all the things we don't know . . .

It took until February 1957 for a star to take direct steps against CONFIDENTIAL. And it was the Negro star, Dorothy Dandridge, who, after an article dealing with her alleged exploits in a forest in "naturalist" company, filed suit against the magazine, asking two million dollars in damages and interest.

With the firing of the first shot, the war was on;

soon a hundred stars who had been slandered by CONFIDENTIAL filed suits for defamation of character, each asking for several million dollars. Perhaps they were not all of them pleased with Dorothy's action, but once the die had been cast no one wanted to stay behind (with the exception of certain "individualists" such as Brando and Welles, Marilyn and Jayne, who did not bother.)

Thus the matter was in the hands of the California courts, but, once it became plain that the courts of that state were planning to summon CONFIDENTIAL before its tribunals for publication of obscene and defamatory stories, and that the stars involved would appear as witnesses, a new panic seized Hollywood. It seems that there was danger that the most important personalities in Hollywood might be quizzed in public about their private lives, and the Gray Eminences once more attempted what they had been doing so successfully in the case of earlier scandals: simply hush the matter up.

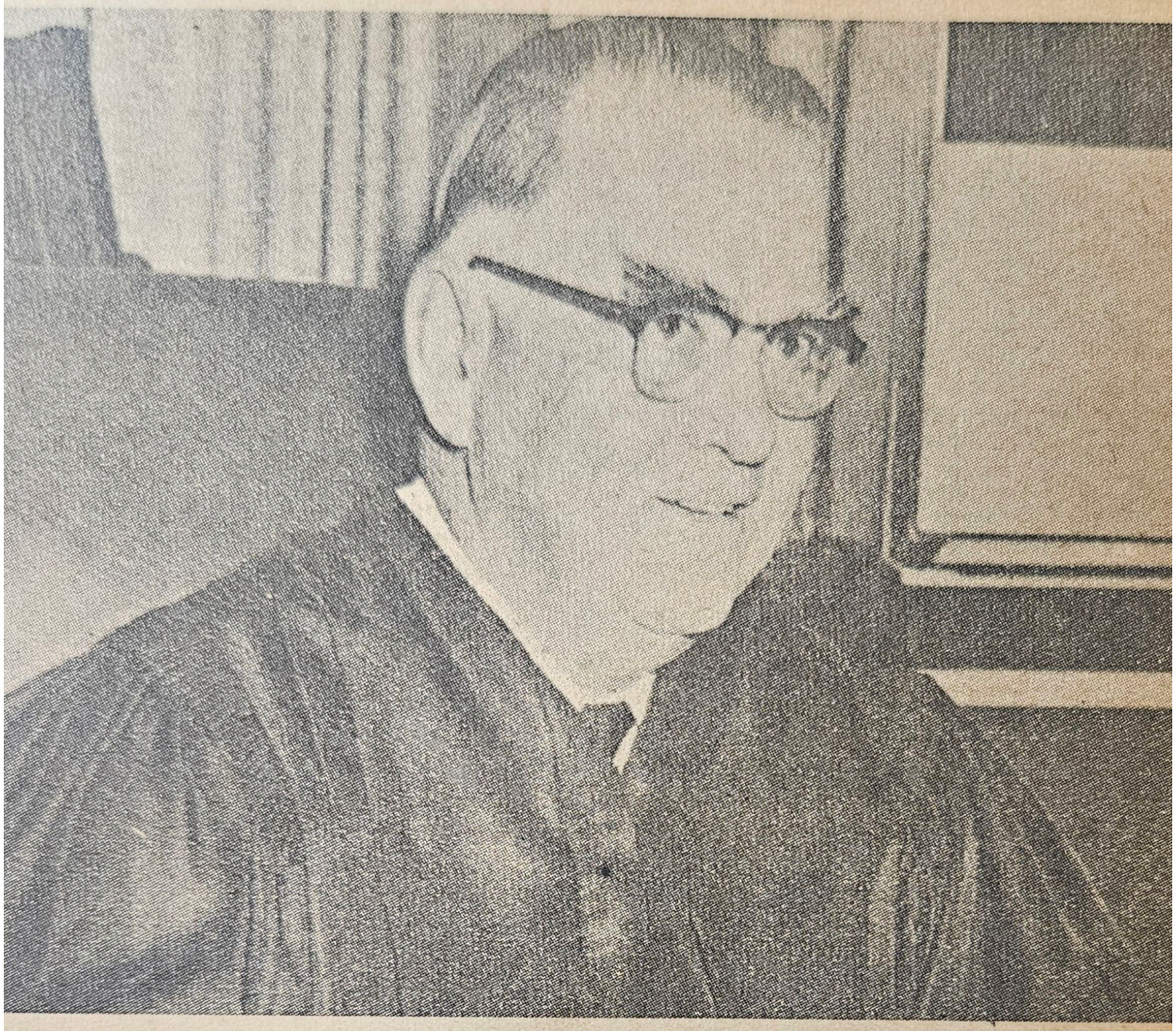
Robert Murphy, Hollywood public relations man, was dispatched to the state capitol for secret talks with the Attorney General. He even threatened to withdraw the financial aid which the motion picture industry was planning to grant to the next Republican campaign, the party in power. But this last-minute maneuver failed, and the state persisted in its plan to take action: Truth had to emerge from these troubled waters, even if it turned out to be bare-ass naked! Upon this new turn of events, many stars again found it advisable to take a vacation; Clark Gable went to sunbathe in Tahiti, while others took off for South America or Europe.

The trial finally started in Los Angeles on August 2, 1957. Hopefully the press had called it: "The Trial of a Hundred Stars". Actually, if you do not count a brief appearance of Dorothy Dandridge,

the clever instigator of it all—who later withdrew her complaint following an amicable financial settlement—the trial only had one star: The incendiary redhead, Maureen O'Hara. But what an incredible sequence she starred in!

CONFIDENTIAL had informed millions of readers that Maureen had behaved very badly with a South American in a "Chinese Chest" game in the famous Grauman's Chinese, the Hollywood theatre. It was told in detail — and in the most realistic style of CONFIDENTIAL — that the affair had taken place in the plush seats of the loge section of this dark hall: "The usher suddenly saw (so Harrison's

Maureen O'Hara: She starred in real-life court drama.



Judge Walker: He wanted more details.

publication related) a couple who "heated up" the floor of the theatre as if it were July. Maureen, bodice unbuttoned and her hair in disarray, had assumed, in order to watch the picture, the oddest posture ever to be beheld in the entire history of motion pictures. She was stretched out on three seats, the happy South American occupying the middle chair, while a picture denouncing juvenile delinquency was being shown on the screen. The usher threw the beam of his flashlight on them, which did not seem to bother them much; then he went to get the manager, and some rather harsh words were exchanged by the three personages. Finally Maureen got up, borrowed the flashlight in order to look for a diamond cuff link which had been lost during the "session", adjusted her bodice and left . . ."

Judge Herbert V. Walker felt some additional information was needed in regard to the actress' position on the three chairs. The scene was recreated in the theatre. The manager of Grauman's agreed to play the part of the South American, while a young woman reporter offered to stand in for the "absent" star. Three theatre seats were commandeered, the manager sat down, and the "double" stretched out — going so far as to put her legs in the air! The recreation was scrupulously exact. The jury, however, wanted to know more — it included six dignified dowagers — and felt it to be absolutely essential to visit the scene of the crime, the loge section of Grauman's. The most minute examination of the three seats in Row 35 did not show them to be in any way different from the thousands of others, all alike in their pneumatic comfort.

Maureen did not reappear until August 17. She presented herself before the tribunal dressed very simply in a little cotton dress and a demure bonnet. Her famous Irish temper gave off sparks when the Judge asked her if she had really had a South American "boy friend".

"I have lots of Mexican friends!" she replied coldly. And Maureen defended herself by proving that at the time of those alleged frolics at Grauman's, she had been in Spain. Her passport was entered as proof. She asked for no less than $5,000,000 in damages and interest. All the witnesses nevertheless persisted in their contention that it had been she whom they had seen. In order to save Maureen from the stake, her sister, an Irish nun, came from the convent in order to defend her. The Court, in turn, requested the use of a lie detector. In spite of the charm of the actress, the facts of the passport and the sermons of an Irish nun, this inhuman machine indicated strongly that Maureen might be fibbing.

There were a number of other revelations during this trial. One was that besides the adorable creatures who worked on Sunset Boulevard, CONFIDENTIAL made use of two first-class informers: Gloria Wellman, the adopted daughter of the director William Wellman, and the would-be starlet Francesca de Scaffa, former wife of Bruce Cabot. These two ladies had taken up this pretty profession in order to satisfy their personal thirst for revenge. A warrant for arrest was issued for Francesca de Scaffa, but the ex-pinup would not be pinned down and managed to escape to Mexico.

The late Mike Todd and Otto Preminger were also accused, by Harrison's former Editor in Chief, of having sold information to CONFIDENTIAL, regarding their numerous enemies. They denied it vehemently, and if Todd acknowledged having furnished to this magazine a spicy story—about himself—it was only for the sake of publicity. It makes one wonder if certain persons might not have done just that. supplying CONFIDENTIAL with some information about themselves. In the back of the mind of more than one pushy starlet, there was one sharp memory—the "success by scandal" of Marilyn Monroe who, by means of a "daring" calendar, from a little pin-up turned into THE super star of the 1950's. Thus all means were considered justified, including being "cover girl" for CONFIDENTIAL, as Jayne Mansfield had to find out.

The first real drama in this "Trial of a Hundred Stars" was the suicide of one of the staff of CONFIDENTIAL, Polly Gould, who killed herself the night of August 16, the night before she was to testify. It was then discovered that Polly had played a double game, selling the secrets of the magazine to the District Attorney and informing Harrison of the maneuvers of the police. Her testimony was certain to embarrass both her employers, and it was

1957 **JANUARY** 1957

SUN	MON	TUE	WED	THU	FRI	SAT
		1	2	3	4	5
6	7	8	9	10	11	12
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20	21	22	23	24	25	26
27	28	29	30	31		

considered that she had wanted to avoid this . . .

More serious were the charges levied against at least one well-known gossip columnist, Aline Mosby. She was simply accused of having been a "double agent" and having written a goodly number of spicy stories for CONFIDENTIAL.

And what about the two other gossips, you ask. Actually the silence of "Lolly" Parsons and "Hatty" Hopper caused a lot of talk . . . not one word in their daily columns regarding the trial which terrified all of Hollywood and fascinated all the States. They went on with their little daily gossip as if the CONFIDENTIAL bomb had never gone off. This certainly was not due to excessive prudishness or disinterested delicacy; Hadn't they made scandal their career, and dirt their profession? Wasn't it Hopper who had spearheaded the attack on Chaplin at the time of the paternity case? Wasn't it Parsons who had brought out the Ingrid Bergman affair, informing all the world that the star of *Joan of Arc* was pregnant, when Rossellini was making *Stromboli?*

They surely would not feel right about attacking their colleagues. Hatty and Lolly—those two—"the enemy sisters" as they are called, thus came to a heroic decision, worthy of *exceptional* circumstances: They held, in secret, a regular council of war, and swore to keep silent in their own immediate interest.

This was, no doubt, one of the rare decisions which those two cruel sharp tongues ever made together. Of course they had, at one time, agreed to break up the career of Marlon Brando, who had had the impudence to insult them with an all-too-precise epithet: ("Fat cows", Brando had said). But their maneuver—which consisted in planting some lying rumors about the color of Marlon's only undershirt, earning him the sobriquet "slob", had

fizzled out, the studios having preferred Brando's T-shirt-appeal to the dirty linen of these national harpies.

The lawsuit: Hollywood versus Confidential — finally ended. After sixty days of discussions, half a million words, one hundred and twenty kilograms of documents and one hundred and thirty six exhibits, the jury retired for deliberation. Under the protection of armed guards, they took two weeks to come to a decision, keeping all of Hollywood in a suspense that was without precedent. The verdict was made public on October 1, by Judge Walker. A hung jury!

Half of the jury had voted for the acquittal of CONFIDENTIAL, the other for conviction. Half of the jurors thus had come to the conclusion that the "revelations" in Harrison's sheet were nothing but lies; for the other half, however, they were disgusting truths. The first suit rendered void by the "mistrial", the matter was put before the Court of Judge Noble in order to be finally settled. This new judge, with his symbolical name, agreed to end the suits for defamation against CONFIDENTIAL, and this, as he explained in a press release, "in order to put an end to the embarrassment of the motion picture industry." There remained the accusation of publication of obscene material; Harrison was nevertheless declared guilty of this infraction, and had to pay a minor fine of ten thousand dollars. Hollywood could breathe again (although its victory did not appear to be very clear-cut) and Harrison retired, a millionaire.

In the wake of the trial, still another drama: Howard Rushmore, the ex-editor-in-chief, killed himself, along with his wife, in a New York taxi. Rushmore, who testified for the State in the suit against his old crew of liars, had lost the game.

Since the end of the affair, certain consequences

remain to be noted. The fan magazines, after losing some circulation, adopted the style of CONFIDENTIAL and promise on their covers lists of sensational "revelations" (which do not amount to much) in the somewhat belated hope of regaining lost ground.

Moreover, in Hollywood, Grauman's Chinese had benefited in a peculiar way. The loge section has become a sort of tourist attraction. The legendary frolics in Row 35 will not soon be forgotten.

Witness to the glories of Hollywood, where, ever since the 1920's, the stars have immortalized their fame by leaving their hand and footprints in the pink cement, Grauman's Chinese Theatre, regular cathedral of the star system, also knows scandal . . . the religion of the Golden Age ends with the snickers at the CONFIDENTIAL affair. The last eddies of the CONFIDENTIAL affair had hardly had time to die down, and the country had begun to talk about something else, when there was another scandal. This time it was the turn of star Lana Turner who, after twenty years of a Hollywood career sprinkled with scandals, had a right to the "Scandal of a Lifetime", which, she felt, must surely come, and which did explode on Good Friday, 1958.

Late at night, the "Attorney of the Stars," Jerry Geisler, was disturbed in his sleep by a telephone call from 730 Bedford Drive, Beverly Hills. In this colonial-style mansion, rented by the star formerly known as the Sweater Girl, a bothersome problem had come up: the pink boudoir was peculiarly disfigured by a disturbing object: the dead body, still warm, of one Johnny Stompanato, alias Johnny Valentine, notorious gangster and gigolo, ex-call boy, former "body guard" of the gangster Mickey Cohen.

In his career as call-boy which began his Holly-

wood career, the handsome Johnny had quickly carved out his way in Hollywood, and became quite sought after by certain very prominent ladies of the film colony, for his exceptional qualities, thus continuing the tradition of the late Bogart and of others. These qualities quickly earned him the

Johnny had solid connections.

Lana Turner: She got Jerry Geisler.

sobriquet "Oscar" on the part of these knowledgeable ladies, referring to the famous award. Johnny thus earned himself a solid repuation as the "Paganini of the Paddock" when, an ingenious call-boy, he had personally called the unlisted phone number of Lana Turner, suggesting to the faintly surprised star a *Blind Date* And La Turner, lonely and "available" after her divorce from Tarzan, Lex Barker, her fourth matrimonial attempt, excited by hearing certain physical features described by the unknown's beautiful voice, accepted the date then and there. Thus the fatal affair began; as far as physical enoyment went, at least, Lana had no reason to complain during the fifteen months their association lasted. Johnny did his job well, and on her part, for once in her life, Lana was overwhelmed. If Johnny had solid connections with crime, Lana could not have cared less; in fact, to have a real gangster for a friend, with a gun under his dinner jacket, only added an extra thrill.

And Lana was well familiar with thrills after a Hollywood career which had lasted for more than twenty years. A starlet at sixteen, a star at seventeen, chubby Julia Ann, now Lana, soon became interested in men, and came to know quite a roster of them. Her husbands: A famous swing musician, professional charmer, millionaire, Tarzan. Her friend: playboys, daddy's boys, stars, handsome Latins who did not count — and reportedly some even more interesting playtime companions.

Marriages and affairs were frequently dotted with episodes of violence, provoked or even requested. Lana was thrown downstairs by one of her husbands, slapped in public by another, drenched with champagne at Ciro's by a third; with her friend, her adventures were enlivened by judo holds

and fisticuffs, and when she went out, her face hidden behind dark glasses, cruel tongues insisted that she was trying to hide a black eye.

It was said that she liked it!

Lana said on this topic: "I find men terribly exciting, and any girl who says she doesn't is an anemic old maid, a streetwalker or a saint." And this excitement, once she reached thirty, became an actual necessity for her; it became an obsession with Johnny. During their brief separation, when she was making *Another Time, Another Place* in England, the letters addressed to her friend showed the cruel need for those "happy aches" inflicted by this too-gifted Don Juan. So she sent him a plane ticket—one of many gifts—and she set him up in housekeeping again in a big rented house in London on the "Street of the Millionaires".

But Johnny, sure now of his power which bound Lana to him by means of a chain to her emotions, like the gentle heroine of the *Histoire d'O*, became more and more demanding. ". . . When I say HOP, you'll hop! When I say JUMP, you'll jump!" he exclaimed; and beside absolute obedience, he also threatened to put his stamp on her. "I'll MUTILATE you, I'll hurt you so you'll be so REPULSIVE you'll have to hide forever!" And the star of *Johnny Eager*, perhaps for the first time in her life, was really frightened and started screaming! This realistic sequence seemed rather more than just a pre-arranged "scene" between master and slave in order to satisfy masochistic urges, and the discreet British servants, alarmed, telephoned Lana's studio which, with the assistance of Scotland Yard, got the dangerous desperado deported from prudish Albion.

Once her tormentor was gone, Lana's real torment started all over again. She suffered cruelly from the absence of her Johnny, her *Oscar*, and

her frantic letters beg for his caresses: "So fierce that they hurt me . . . it is beautiful, and yet it is terrible . . . I am yours and I need you, MY MAN!"

The affair was soon resumed in Mexico, in idyllic Acapulco, where the couple lay on the beach, sunbathing, during the day, and at night disturbed the rest of the guests in adjoining rooms at the Hotel Via Vera.

Then came the return to Hollywood, where a fourteen-year-old daughter awaited them at the airport: Cheryl, the daughter of Lana and Steve Crane, a confused and somewhat disturbed teenager, like most of the offspring of the dream factory.

Cheryl was there, in the big house on Bedford Drive, invited to spend that Easter weekend with her mother, when Johnny decided to play his big card, his last ace and in the boudoir on the first floor, while Johnny abused Lana, threatening her with physical harm and, worse still, swearing to revenge himself on her entire family, Cheryl was listening at the door . . .

Like a brave Girl Scout, according to her own and Lana's accounts, she ran into the kitchen, grabbed the first weapon she found — a knife nine inches in length — and again ran to her mother's aid.

Lana later was to testify, in the course of the inquiry;

"Everything happened so quickly that I did not even see the knife in my daughter's hand. I thought she had hit him in the stomach with her fist. Mr. Stompanato stumbled forward, turned around and fell on his back. He choked, his hands on his throat. I ran to him and lifted up his sweater. I saw the blood . . . he made a horrible noise in his throat . . ."

On the stand, the star was taken ill, tears fell from her swollen eyelids, she almost fainted. Com-

motion in the audience and among the reporters—flashbulbs going off. She rallied and went on:

"I tried to breathe air into his semi-open lips . . . my mouth against his . . ." The star again was seized by dizziness. Flash bulbs. Her attorney, Jerry Geisler, supported her. A bailiff brought her a glass of water. Then the star, pale as death, in a strangled voice, finished:

"He was dying."

She was seized by a crying spell, a deadly silence fell in the courtroom, and all that could be heard was the clicking of the camera shutters, the humming of the tape recorders, and Lana's sobs.

The press was unanimous: the most dramatic scene of her career. And the verdict of the jury on the inquest was: self defense. The yellow press rejoiced in this windfall. For the Easter weekends, the headlines already announced: THE DRAMA OF GOOD FRIDAY—the drama of Lana, of course. All the details of her lively past were dug up, her dissolute life spread out for inspection, as in the days of Mabel Normand or Mary Astor.

As in the case of Mary Miles Minter, the love letters of Lana Turner, found at Johnny's home by his hoodlum friends were to furnish the tantalizing subject matter for "page one" of an entire rash of special editions.

All America was panting over these indiscreet revelations on the love life of a star, dragged out into the open.

In the papers, radio, television, Lana was pilloried as dissolute, unnatural mother, and more, by the columnists, the gossips, the clergy, sociologists and psychoanalysts. Her daughter Cheryl was defended or condemned.

"Cheryl's act is a permanent wound on American civilization," growled a judge who was out for publicity. "My heart bleeds for Cheryl", burbled

Hedda Hopper.

Of all the gossip columnists, only Walter Winchell defended the sweater girl in his columns:

"She is made of rays of the sun, woven of blue eyes, honey-colored hair and flowing curves. She is Lana Turner, Goddess of the screen. Soon, the magician leaves and the shadows take over. All the hidden cruelties appear. She is lashed by vicious reporting, flogged by the editorials, and threatened with being deprived of her child. And, of course, it is outraged virtue which screams the loudest . . . It seems sadistic to me to subject Lana Turner to any more torment. No punishment that could be imagined could hurt her more than the memory of this nightmarish event. And she is condemned to live with this memory to the end of her days . . . In short, give your heart to the girl with the broken heart . . ."

This defense provoked an avalanche of furious letters from women's clubs and old fools, among them a letter from Gloria Swanson in which the Old Glory cut loose:

"Walter, I think it is disgusting that you are trying to whitewash Lana. You are not a loyal American . . . You want to be considered all-powerful? You are only a has-been, and everybody knows it except you. As far as that poor Lana Turner is concerned, the only true thing you said about her is that she sleeps in a woolen nightgown . . . She is not even an actress . . . she is only a trollop . . . (signed) Gloria Swanson."

Like Mary Astor before her, Lana managed to pull out of it fairly well; in this dangerous game of scandal, the original sweater girl has come out on top.

Box office way up: 30 percent on one film, as her producer Jerry Wald explained, rubbing his hands.

Contracts galore: First of all, the part of a mother in conflict with her daughter in the poorly-done *Imitation of Life*. Thus, Happy End. Right now we see the star appearing at the premiere of her latest film at Grauman's Chinese Theatre, arm in arm with the tall daughter once known as "Cheryl the Ripper", both flashing commercial smiles under the floodlights of the various stations.

And Johnny? Lana had not even sent a wreath for the tomb of her exciting partner of four hundred and twenty days; she will forget in other embraces, other arms, faithful if not exact copies of Johnny's; for that purpose, in the recesses of the Beverly Hills underworld, replacements are not hard to find.

Lana will continue to make movies, and to fall, unless she continues to "pay," into the twilight of the Hollywood gods . . . Until that inevitable day when she will be neither physically appealing, nor profitable box office, but merely another has-been.

The has-beens depart, and Lana will take her place next to Alice Faye, Betty Grable and Anita Page, blonde idols of yesteryear. Other fallen idols disappear behind the walls of sanitariums: after Frances Farmer, the madwoman of the Forties, there comes, twice, the turn of Gene Tierney, of Gail Russell, Oscar Levant and a number of others.

Some get religion, like the ex-lover of Lupe Velez, Gary Cooper, who would have preferred a spiritual lifting after the failure of that of his face. Mary Pickford, under the same circumstances, had her mystical crisis. Finally, the silk-quilted coffin closes on Tyrone Power as on Bela Lugosi, and the smoke of the incense replaces the other, more troubled, or *benares* and *kief*. As compared to James Dean, Ty died too late to have his cult, and at his funeral, the fans did not fight to pull flowers from

his wreaths, but only to ask for autographs from the "Phallic Skull," Yul Brynner.

James Dean, the *flesh ash tray* almost becomes a has-been; among the legions of teenagers, his cult seems definitely "buried". If the bust of the star is still in place in the "Hall of Immortals" at the University of Princeton, between Plato and Socrates, the emblems, fetishes and masks in miracle flesh are handed down to younger brothers and sisters, odd toys to replace atomic pistols and dolls. (*La Pedale,* though, apparently still remembers). The procession of fans who filed past his tomb, the "inconsolable" young girls who wore mourning at the premiere of *Giant,* have deserted the shadow in order to pursue new idols, and new cults.

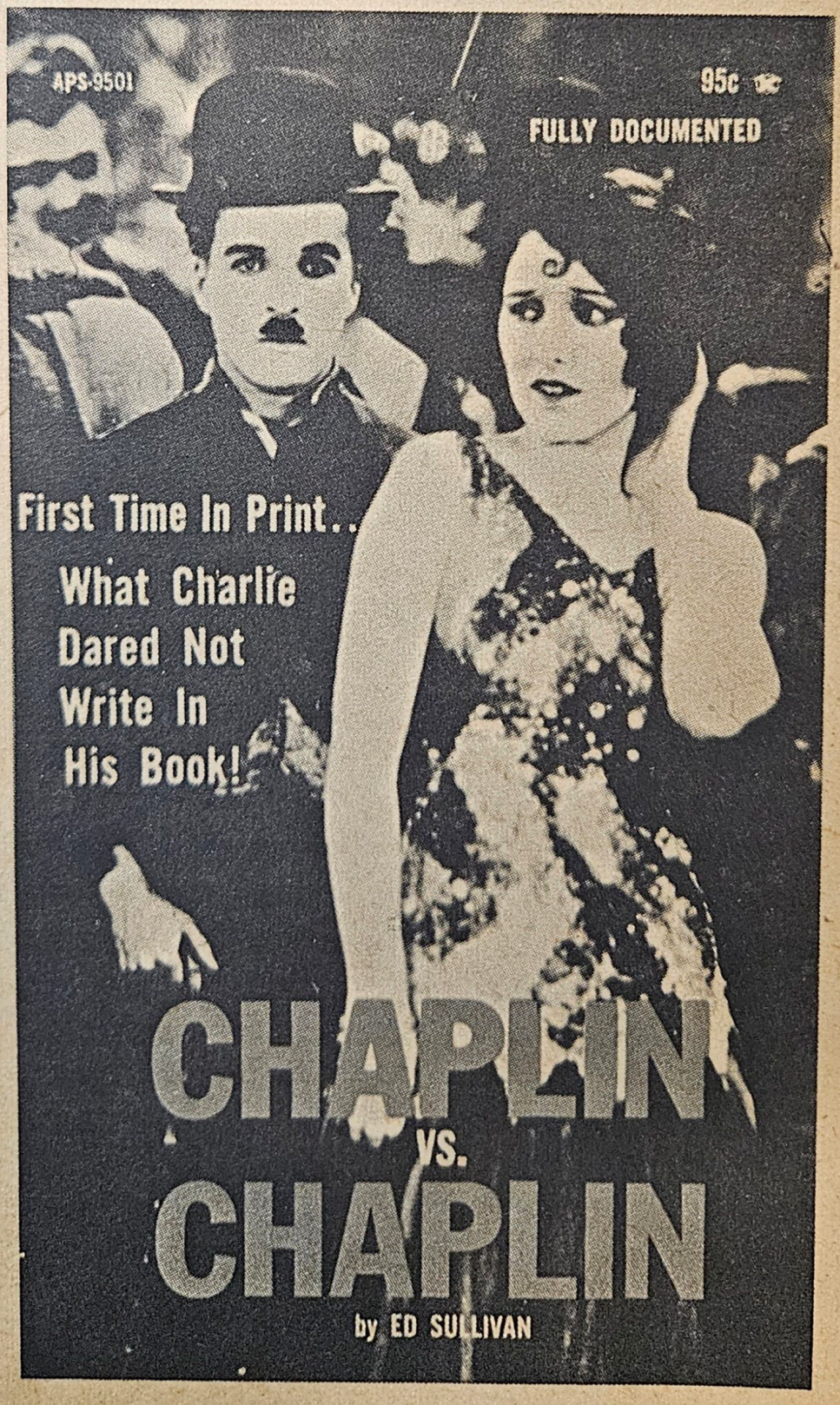
And there—for a time—is the new triumphant idol, Elvis Presley, star of Hollywood, King of rock-and-roll, darling of the teenagers, wiggling his magic breeches and driving them wild with his frantic belly dance and his rutting cries: a a barbarous god, and far removed from Rudy! But who reflects one by his favorites and his tastes.

Elvis, the first "dirty star" in a long time, a true marketing phenomenon, as vain as Valentino, addicted to luxury as much as he, with his noisy wardrobe; the rainbow of his six Cadillacs, and the train of his six boyhood companions whom he has kept with him makes one think of an evolution in the mores. For they do change, even in puritanical countries. *"Today, some people consider something a moral lesson which used to be thought scandalous."* (Voltaire) and Elvis Presley, master of the "Ballets", perhaps gives us a foretaste of what the morals of the future will be like. In the proliferation of Hollywood folly during the Fifties, the key to which may be found in the magazine CONFIDENTIAL, and led by Elvis Presley, and the apotheosis of which was the affair of Lana

Turner, some people see a last orgy of Balthazar, while on the walls of this modern Babylon there appear in neon lights the fateful words: "Mene Mene Tekel Upharsin"—weighted, counted, divided —marking the end of the accursed town.

After the city of Semiramis it is now the turn of the Capital of Motion Pictures to be put on the scales and be found wanting. It is said that its days are numbered, and that its realm will be divided up. Let us admit that the end of RKO, the closing of Universal, the piteous condition of the other dream factories, emptied, and selling their "treasures" to television, which have taken over their lots, do not seem to deny this menacing prophecy. Thus Howard Hughes, having sold RKO to television, has given his opinion as a businessman: "Hollywood is through," followed by Orson Welles who also pronounced the death of Hollywood. For the Cassandras, the "graveyard of virtue" has become a cemetery pure and simple. According to them, it is not just the Sunset which lies over the Boulevard of Illusions, but the Blackout.

Nevertheless, in the night which has fallen over the closed sound stages and the empty swimming pools, that rosy glow, what is it? The promise of a new dawn, hope entering on tiptoe?

It is Jayne Mansfield offering herself to us, all of her. Jayne, who has made Scandal her career, who assures us that the Hollywood Way of Life is still a good one; that it is very pleasant to be a beautiful star, to have a well-muscled husband, to have fun, and, also, the love of the Dollar. It is Jayne who shows us her happiness through the chinks in the shutters of her private life: that *Vie en Rose* — rosy life — which she has made for herself, for she has listened to the fairies at her cradle who whispered: "Lucky is she who is touched by Scandal . . ."

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